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ABSTRACT

Many countries have initiated quality assurance mechanisms for higher education, and more are in the process of developing quality assurance strategies. The experience of India, detailed in this case study, can provide valuable lessons for other countries. The accreditation experience of India may seem to be just 8 years old, but it must be considered in the context of quality controls that India already had for higher education, many of which were inherited from the British legacy of higher education. Inspections and audits by state governments, the affiliating function of universities (in the case of colleges), performance appraisal by the University Grants Commission, and review by funding agencies all contributed to higher education quality, as did inspection and certification by professional bodies. In India, the national context includes limited resources for improvement in higher education. The balancing of the national context and international expectations provides a valuable lesson for countries contemplating quality assurance strategies. This report also describes the unit of assessment, the reporting strategy, institutional response, benefits of accreditation, and the impact on the higher education system. Chapters are: (1) "The Structure and Governance of Indian Higher Education"; (2) "Emerging Trends in Indian Higher Education"; (3) "The Breakthrough in Quality Assurance"; (4) "The Instrument and Methodology"; (5) "Setting Priorities"; (6) "Problems and Challenges"; (7) "Towards Solutions"; (8) "The Accreditation Experience of ABC College"; (9) "The Impact"; (10) "Learning from Experience"; and (11) "Future Perspectives for Quality Assessment." Seven appendixes contain additional information about self-study and accreditation processes. (Contains 19 references.) (SLD)

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New trends in higher education

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Case study
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New trends in higher education

**External quality assurance
in Indian higher education:**
case study of the National Assessment
and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

Antony Stella



International Institute for Educational Planning

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIU	Association of Indian Universities
CABE	Central Advisory Board of Education
CEC	Consortium for Educational Communication
CMI	Carmelites of Mary Immaculate
DCE	Directorate of Collegiate Education
EC	Executive Committee
EQA	External Quality Assurance
GC	General Council
GNP	Gross National Product
HOD	Head of Department
INFLIBNET	Information and Library Network
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resources Development
MoA	Memorandum of Association
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAAC	National Assessment and Accreditation Council
NBA	Not Board of Accreditation
NET	National Eligibility Test
NIEPA	National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration
NIIT	National Institute of Information Technology
NPE	National Policy on Education
NQFHE	National Qualifications Framework in Higher Education
PHE	Private higher Education
PoA	Plan of Action
PTA	Parent Teacher Association

SLETs	State Level Eligibility Tests
TANSCH	Tamil Nadu State Council for Higher Education
TOTE	Teacher Oriented Televised Education
UGC	University Grants Commission
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
WBSCH	West Bengal State Council for Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Quality in higher education has become the prime agenda of countries worldwide. In the changing context marked by expansion of higher education and globalization of economic activities, education has become a national concern with an international dimension. To cope with this changing context, countries have been pressurized to ensure and assure quality of higher education at a nationally comparable and internationally acceptable standard. Consequently, many countries initiated "national quality assurance mechanisms" and many more are in the process of evolving a suitable strategy. Most of the quality assurance bodies were established in the nineties and after a few years of practical experience, they are rethinking many issues of quality assurance. At this juncture where countries look for experiences and practices elsewhere, the experience of India has many valuable lessons and this report is an attempt to share those developments.

The accreditation experience of India may seem to be just eight years old, but it should be considered in the backdrop of quality controls that the Indian higher education system had already for the past 150 years, most of them inherited from the British legacy of higher education. In independent India, various regulations on minimum requirements for the establishment and expansion of institutions of higher education have been well in place for more than fifty years. Inspections and audits by state governments, the affiliating function of universities (in the case of colleges), performance appraisal of universities by the University Grants Commission and review by funding agencies have all contributed to ensuring "satisfactory functioning". Inspection and certification by Professional bodies,

which is primarily a process of recognition or approval, has been in place for a long time. Consequently national accreditation in India is a process much more than the regulatory or recognition mechanisms mentioned above. It aims to lead institutions of higher education towards maximizing their potential for quality education.

The national context in terms of limited resources available for improvement in quality, size and complexity of the higher education system add to the unique scenario of accreditation in India. The way the national context has been balanced with international expectations may offer a valuable lesson for countries that are contemplating their quality assurance strategies. Furthermore, the unit of assessment that is chosen, the reporting strategy adopted, response received from the institutions, benefits of accreditation and the impact it has created on the system etc. have a wealth of information for other countries and this report makes an attempt to highlight this experience.

It is needless to emphasize that sharing experiences among countries is always useful to broaden the horizon of the thought process, analysis and evaluation. The Indian experience may not offer a perfect solution to problems under consideration of another country, since any strategy has to necessarily take cognizance of the contextual conditions. But at the juncture of evaluating the outcomes and rethinking strategies, the experience of another country is always useful. The Indian experience should be viewed with this understanding.

INTRODUCTION

Quality in higher education has become the prime task of countries the world over. In countries like India, the explicit focus on quality enhancement in higher education through an external mechanism is relatively new. Until recently, access to higher education itself, for an increased percentage of the relevant age group, was an indicator of national progress; graduating from an institution of higher education meant, for an individual, a stamp of differentiation from the masses. In the changing situation, however, marked by expansion of higher education and globalization of economic activities, education has become a national concern with an international dimension. To cope with this changing situation, countries have been pressurized to ensure and assure quality of higher education at a nationally comparable and internationally acceptable standard. Consequently, many countries have initiated 'national quality-assurance mechanisms' and many more are in the process of evolving a suitable strategy. Most of the quality-assurance bodies were established in the nineties and, after a few years of practical experience, they are rethinking many issues of quality assurance. At this juncture, where countries look for experiences and practices elsewhere, the experience of India has many valuable lessons.

The accreditation experience of India may seem to be just seven years old, but it should be considered against the backdrop of quality controls known by the Indian higher education system for the past 150 years, most of them part of the British legacy in higher education. In independent India, the various regulations on minimum requirements for the establishment and expansion of institutions of higher education have been well in place for more than 50 years.

Inspections and audits by state governments, the affiliating function of the universities (in the case of colleges), performance appraisal of universities by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and reviews by funding agencies have all contributed to ensuring 'satisfactory functioning'. Inspection and certification by professional bodies, which are primarily a recognition or approval process, have been in place for a long time. With such regulatory and recognition mechanisms already established, what is new in the process of national accreditation?

The term 'accreditation' is used to denote different things in different countries. In the USA, the pioneer in accreditation, the process of accreditation is the "equivalent of other countries' ministerial recognition of institutions belonging to the national system" (www.ed.gov). The process of national accreditation in India, however, is much more than the regulatory or recognition mechanisms mentioned above. Consequently, the objective for such a mechanism is different from that of existing systems of regulation in the country. It aims to lead institutions of higher education towards maximizing their potential for quality education, contrary to the minimum standards ensured by the regulatory mechanisms.

The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) defines accreditation by using the generic term 'quality assurance'. The INQAAHE definition of quality assurance is as follows: "... quality assurance may relate to a programme, an institution or a whole higher education system. In each case, quality assurance consists of all attitudes, objects, actions, and procedures which, through their existence and use, combined with quality control activities, ensure that appropriate academic standards are being maintained and enhanced in and by each programme. Quality assurance extends to making the process and standards known to the educational community and the public at

large". If the built-in regulatory mechanisms are to be equated with the quality-assurance mechanisms that serve similar purposes elsewhere, the Indian system of quality assurance may be said to be more than a century old. However, accreditation as an 'explicit-national-external quality-assurance mechanism' was initiated only in 1994. This makes the Indian system of accreditation unique in many ways.

The limited resources available for improvement in quality and the size and complexity of the higher education system in India are other factors contributing to India's unique scenario of accreditation. The way in which the national conditions have been balanced with international expectations may offer a valuable lesson for countries that are contemplating their quality-assurance strategies. Other countries can benefit from the wealth of information and experience accumulated on the unit of assessment chosen, the reporting strategy adopted, response received from the institutions, the benefits of accreditation, the impact it has created on the system, etc. This case study attempts to highlight this experience.

Sharing experiences among countries is always useful for broadening the horizons of the thought process, in analysis and in evaluation. The Indian experience may not offer a perfect solution to the problems of another country, since any strategy has to necessarily take cognizance of the specific conditions within that country, but at the juncture of evaluating the outcomes and rethinking strategies, the experiences of other countries are always valuable. The Indian experience should be viewed with this understanding in mind.

In fact it was in this spirit that the Indian system of accreditation was evolved during 1986-1994, drawing from experiences of other countries. India also had the advantage of lessons learned through

its own regulatory mechanisms. Considerable efforts were put into analyzing systems elsewhere and adapting them to suit Indian conditions. Throughout the process of implementing the strategy and its fine-tuning, during the past eight years (1994-2002), the problems and challenges NAAC had to face, the strategies adopted to tackle these problems, and the unintended consequences NAAC came across were numerous. As the system evolved, both strengths and weaknesses have emerged and a discussion on those issues will be useful to other countries for them to build on similar strengths and avoid the failures.

I. THE STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The accreditation system of India began as a top-down model but incorporates the critical element of voluntary participation of the institutions of higher education. It was initiated as a response to the country's need for quality enhancement at the national level. The huge, complex and diverse system of Indian higher education needed quality controls over and above the routine regulatory mechanisms. To appreciate the development of such a mechanism and the objectives it is set forth to achieve, an overview of the structure and governance of Indian higher education, that forms the backdrop of the accreditation initiatives, is given in this chapter.

The Indian higher education system has its origin in the nineteenth century. The 'structure and governance' of most of the Indian institutions of higher education are modelled on the British example known as the London Model. Institutions of higher education are established either by Acts of Parliament or by state legislation. The first three Indian universities to be set up by the British rulers were at Bombay (now, Mumbai), Calcutta (now, Kolkata) and Madras (now, Chennai) in the year 1857; there were 21 universities in the country at the time of independence in 1947. Today, India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world. It has 274 university-level institutions, more than 112,600 colleges, 8 million students and 0.4 million teachers.

State governments play the main role in the higher education system in the country. They are responsible for the establishment of state universities and colleges and provide plan grants for their

development and non-plan grants for their maintenance. Although the states are the major providers, the central government has a special constitutional responsibility in education. As an outcome of the constitutional amendment of 1976, education is on the 'Concurrent List' which gives exclusive legislative power to the central government for co-ordination and determination of standards in institutions of higher education. The co-ordination and co-operation in education between the union and the states is brought about through the Central Advisory Board of Education.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) serves as a link between union and state governments and institutions of higher learning. Established by an Act of Parliament in 1956, it discharges the constitutional mandate of co-ordination, determination, and maintenance of standards of teaching, examination and research in higher education. UGC receives both plan and non-plan grants from the central government to carry out responsibilities assigned to it by law. It allocates and disburses full maintenance and development grants to central universities, colleges affiliated to the Delhi and Banaras Hindu Universities and to some institutions accorded with the status of 'deemed-to-be universities'. State universities, colleges and other institutions of higher education receive UGC support (less than 5 per cent of their budget in most cases), provided they fulfil the eligibility criteria laid down by UGC, only from the plan grant for development schemes. In addition, UGC provides financial assistance to universities and colleges under various schemes/programmes for promoting relevance and quality of higher education and also for promoting the role occupied by universities in social change. During the year 1999-2000, it received Rs.3,800 million from the central government under the plan grant and Rs.6,400 million under the non-plan grant.

Types of institutions of higher education

After independence, which coincided with the post-Second World War era, India made concerted efforts to improve access to higher education. Today, availability of institutions of higher learning within a radius of 100 kilometres for rural areas and at a much lesser distance for semi-urban and urban areas, has been ensured. Several sections of society, hitherto neglected and deprived of access to higher education because of socio-economic reasons, have benefited from the expansion of the system. The percentage of first-generation learners acquiring a degree is on the rise. Trained labour in science and technology is also increasing. All this has been achieved through the complex system of higher education, with its diverse constituencies – central universities, state universities, deemed-to-be universities, institutions of national importance, affiliated colleges, autonomous colleges, constituent colleges, etc. – that vary in their structure and the linkage they have with each other.

Universities

Only universities and university-level institutions are conferred with the power to award degrees. Universities are basically of two types – unitary and affiliating. Unitary universities are confined to teaching and research in their own departments. In most cases they have a single campus with provision for postgraduate instruction, in addition to strong emphasis on research. The University of Hyderabad and Jawaharlal Nehru University are notable examples.

An affiliating university generally has a central campus with departments or schools that impart postgraduate instruction and conduct research. It would also have various affiliated colleges to them that may be distributed throughout a large number of districts, in accordance with the jurisdiction of the university. The colleges

are mostly responsible for undergraduate teaching, though some of them also have postgraduate classes in selected subjects. In states like Tamil Nadu the colleges offer a range of postgraduate programmes and some of them are also active in research. Most Indian universities are of the affiliating type with the larger ones, such as the Osmania University in the state of Andhra Pradesh and the Bangalore University in the state of Karnataka, having more than 400 affiliated colleges each. The affiliating university legislates on courses of study and holds examinations centrally on common syllabi for its affiliates.

In addition, there are two other types of university-level institutions – 'Deemed-to-be universities' and 'Institutions of national importance'. Deemed-to-be universities (also referred to as Deemed universities) are institutions that are conferred with the status of a university by virtue of their long tradition of teaching, specialization and/or excellence in a particular area of knowledge. Examples are the Birla Institute of Technology and Science (Pilani) and the Tata Institute of Social Science (Mumbai). The central government is responsible for the declaration of educational institutions as 'Deemed-to-be universities' on the recommendation of UGC.

The 'Institutions of national importance' are established, or so designated, through Acts of Parliament. There are eleven institutions of this type, including the six Indian Institutes of Technology. As a special case, they are empowered to award their own degrees – a privilege normally granted only to universities.

Colleges

Colleges are managed by their respective governing body, which secures and manages the finances and appoints both the principal and the teaching staff. It is composed of representatives of the promoters of the college, the university, the state government, and

the teaching staff, besides the principal as an ex-officio member secretary.

The university has substantial authority over the colleges. It prescribes the physical and financial standards to be met by the colleges, as well as course content and textbooks for the various courses of study offered. The university quite often also nominates the experts on selection committees for teachers and principals. Examinations are the prerogative of the university and colleges prepare students for the degree awarded by the university. The university has the power to inspect the colleges and scrutinize their financial and academic records. It monitors the activities of the colleges so that they operate according to the norms and standards prescribed. The state government as the funding body has its own monitoring mechanisms and colleges must therefore comply with the norms and stipulations of both the university to which they are affiliated and the state government.

Colleges are of several types. They can be classified into various categories depending on the freedom they enjoy to innovate in curriculum, funding pattern, programme offerings, management structure and their relationship with the parent university.

Affiliated v. autonomous colleges. The present affiliating type of higher education system in India, called the 'London Model', is a British legacy. Though the UK has done away with this system, India still follows it for want of better alternatives acceptable to the majority of its academia. In this model, affiliated colleges function under the governance of a university and the parent university acts as the supreme body in all academic matters: designing curricula, conducting examinations, publishing results and awarding degrees. The curricular transaction alone becomes the responsibility of the colleges. This system was efficient when the number of affiliated

colleges was small. With their increase, however, the dissatisfaction with the affiliating system has also grown.

To overcome the rigidity of the affiliating structure, various committees on education recommended 'academic freedom' to deserving colleges. The concept of 'academic autonomy' found a place in the Report of the University Education Commission (1948). It was further reiterated in the Report of the Committee on Colleges (1964), the Education Commission Report (1964-1966), the Recommendations of UGC (1973) and, later, in the National Policy on Education of 1986 (NPE-1986). NPE-1986 observed that: "In view of mixed experiences with the system of affiliation, autonomous colleges will be helped to develop in large numbers until the affiliation system is replaced by a free and more creative association of universities with colleges".

Autonomy for a college means and implies that both the college and its teachers assume full responsibility and accountability for the academic programmes they provide, for the content and quality of their teaching, and for the admission and assessment of their students. The parent university continues to provide general guidelines, and confers degrees upon the successful candidates, accepting the evaluation performed by the autonomous college and mentioning its name. Though the Programme of Action of the NPE-1986 had envisaged the establishment of 500 autonomous colleges in the Seventh Plan (1985-1990), the number of colleges granted autonomy so far falls short of this target. In some states there is resistance to the scheme due to apprehensions related to faculty workload, power of the management, the conduct of internal examinations, financial implications and operational difficulties in its implementation. Hence the number of autonomous colleges at the end of the year 2000 was only about 130.

Government v. private colleges: Colleges can also be classified into three types of establishment: government-run, privately-managed and university-run colleges, depending on who manages and administers the institution. The government-run colleges are few, only about 15 per cent of the total. Although they are managed by the concerned state government, as in the case of other colleges, the university to which these colleges are affiliated lays down the courses of studies, conducts their examinations and awards the degrees.

Privately-managed trusts or societies have founded the greater number of colleges – about 70 per cent of the total. More than a third of these colleges have been established in rural areas. Their management is constituted according to norms laid down by the statutes of the university concerned. The University Act and Statutes define the relationship between the colleges and the university. The power of granting affiliation to a college generally vests with universities and is exercised in consultation with state governments.

University colleges, called constituent colleges, are run and managed by the university itself. Their total number is very small.

Arts and science v. professional colleges: Depending on the courses of study offered, colleges may be classified into two types – arts and science and professional. Professional colleges are mostly in disciplines of medicine, engineering, education and management, and for a few others. Most of them are private initiatives.

Grant-in-aid v. self-financing colleges: The private colleges established before the eighties obtained substantial government funds and are known as grant-in-aid colleges. More than 95 per cent of their financial support comes from the state government. The self-financing colleges do not receive substantial funds from the state and charge fees from students in order to cover their capital and running

costs. While higher education in grant-in-aid institutions is almost free for the students (Until recently the student fee per annum was around US\$10 in many institutions. Even the current revised fees are not more than US\$ 60 for most of the programmes), the fee structure in self-financing institutions is relatively high. The growth of private colleges after the eighties has its background in the resource crunch experienced by the government.

When India became independent from British rule in 1947, the then national government virtually 'nationalized' all existent universities and colleges and commenced funding them directly. Those institutions that were originally established and maintained by private philanthropists were taken over by the government, provided state support and have come to be known as grant-in-aid institutions. The number of universities grew from 21 at the time of independence to more than 200 by the late 1980s and the number of colleges increased from 500 to approximately 5,000 during that period. By then, the resources of the government had reached their limit and most of the state governments ceased to establish or fund new colleges. The students' preferences had also shifted from liberal arts and science to professional programmes of studies, particularly in areas related to engineering, medicine, management and computer applications. The combined effect of these two factors resulted in the emergence of a new category of private institutions, encouraged by the government. This new crop of private initiatives, locally called 'self-financing' institutions, functions under the academic regulations of universities in the area and now outnumbers public institutions in many states, especially in the southern states of India.

Nearly a third of the colleges are self-financing, and most of them have been established during the past 10 to 15 years. The spread of self-financing colleges in the country is not even. In southern states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra, there

are far more self-financing than there are public colleges; it is not the case in north India. In Tamil Nadu, one of the southern states in India, where private higher education flourishes, out of 477 general education colleges, 230 are public-funded and 247 are self-financing. The number of self-financing professional colleges is much higher than that of general education colleges. This pattern is true for other professional undergraduate institutions in medicine, management, law and education.

Structure of academic qualifications and student enrolment

In the Indian system, higher education is that which is imparted after the 10+2 stage – ten years of primary and secondary education followed by two years of higher secondary education. There are three major levels of qualification in the higher education system:

1. Bachelor/undergraduate level;
2. Master/postgraduate level;
3. Doctoral level.

Diploma programmes are also available at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The duration of diploma programmes at the undergraduate level varies from one to three years and postgraduate diplomas are normally awarded after a year's study.

A bachelor's degree in arts, commerce and sciences is awarded after three years of education (after 12 years of school education). In some places honours and special programmes are available, which are not longer in duration but indicate greater depth of study. A bachelor's degree in professional fields of study in agriculture, dentistry, engineering, pharmacy, technology and veterinary medicine generally takes four years, while in architecture and medicine it takes five to five and a half years respectively. There are other bachelor's

degrees in education, journalism and library science that are second degrees. A bachelor's degree in law can either be taken as an integrated degree programme, lasting for five years, or as a three-year programme as a second degree.

A master's degree is normally of two-year duration. It could be only course work-based without a thesis, or research alone.

A pre-doctoral programme – Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) – is taken after completion of the master's degree. This may either be completely research-based or include course work as well. A Ph.D. is awarded either two years after the M.Phil. or three years after the master's degree. Students are expected to write a substantial thesis based on original research. The research degrees (M.Phil. and Ph.D.) take variable time depending upon the individual student.

Eighty-eight per cent of the total enrolment in higher education is in undergraduate education and only 9.5 per cent is in postgraduate education. The remaining 2.5 per cent concerns diploma and doctoral-level programmes. In 1998, in general higher education alone, enrolment in graduate, postgraduate and research were 5,136,183 (90.86 per cent), 477,434 (8.44 per cent) and 39,968 (0.70 per cent) respectively. Enrolment in research is much less in professional areas as compared to that in general higher education. A high percentage of graduate (approximately 88 per cent) and postgraduate students (56.5 per cent) are in colleges.

Even in states where private higher education thrives, only less than 20 per cent of students are enrolled in self-financing high-fee-structure institutions, in spite of the fact that these private higher education institutions outnumber public-funded colleges. This is largely because the cost of education is high in these institutions, while it costs virtually nothing in public-funded institutions. As the number and diversity of institutions mushroomed rapidly without

any market survey, there is a dearth of students enrolling in some of these colleges. Consequently, such colleges either extend concessions in fee levels or lower eligibility criteria of aspiring students. The latter case has led to serious concerns about the quality of education offered in these institutions. A recent Supreme Court judgement has laid down a number of guidelines for admissions and fees to be charged by such private colleges.

Most of the student population is under the umbrella of general higher education. The major professional courses absorb only a small proportion of the student population, that is, around 15 per cent. In order of enrolment, these are law, engineering, medicine, agriculture, and veterinary science.

Policy framework and National Policies on Education (NPE)

India's commitment to the spread of knowledge and freedom of thought among its citizens is reflected in its constitution. The Directive Principle in Article 45 enjoins that "the state shall endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years". Article 29 (i) provides that any citizen having a distinct language, script or culture shall have the right to conserve the same. Special care of the economic and educational interests of the underprivileged sections, particularly scheduled castes and tribes, is laid down as an obligation of the state under Article 46.

With these constitutional obligations in the backdrop, the National Policies on Education (NPE) have played a major role in the development of the Indian higher education system. National Policies on Education are policy documents that spell out the policy framework and directions for the development of education in the

country. They are evolved in the light of the goal of national development and priorities set from time to time. The NPE of 1968 marked a significant step by aiming to promote national progress, a sense of common citizenship, culture and national integration. It stressed the need for *a radical reconstruction of the education system, to improve its quality at all stages*. Since the adoption of the 1968 policy, there has been considerable expansion of educational facilities all over the country at all levels. Perhaps the most notable development has been the acceptance by most states of a common structure of education throughout the country and the introduction of the 10+2+3 system (10 years of schooling + 2 years of post-secondary + 3 years of undergraduate studies). A beginning was also made in the restructuring of courses at the undergraduate level.

While the expansion of the system of higher education has been impressive, the other general formulations incorporated in the 1968 policy were not, however, translated into expected outcomes. As a result, problems of access, quality, utility, financial outlay, etc. continued to accumulate over the years and assumed such massive proportions that they had to be tackled without any further delay. This ushered in the need for a new education policy.

Meanwhile, growing concern for the quality of education at all levels brought in the compulsion to make the Constitutional Amendment of 1976, in order to put education onto the Concurrent List so that the central government could have a meaningful role in ensuring quality of education. Until then, education had remained the responsibility of the state governments. This important amendment required the union government and states to share the responsibility of maintaining the standard of education. While the role and responsibility of the states remained essentially unchanged, the union government had a larger role once education was brought

on to the Concurrent List. It must reinforce the national and integrative character of education, **to maintain quality and standards**, and monitor the educational requirements of the country as a whole. Concurrence signifies a partnership that is at once meaningful and challenging. The National Education Policy of 1986 was oriented towards giving effect to this meaningful and challenging responsibility in both letter and spirit.

In addition to the yet-to-be-tackled problems identified by the 1968 policy on education and the constitutional amendment of 1976, the new Education Policy of 1986 had to take note of other national concerns such as education for all. Consequently, the policy document emphasized that, up to a given level, all students irrespective of caste, creed, location or gender, should have access to education of a comparable quality. While this aspect of the national policy is mostly related to school education, the changing conditions worldwide have brought in the additional responsibility of increasing access to higher education. Along with efforts towards universalization of elementary education, the country had to improve **access to higher education of a comparable quality**. With reference to higher education, the policy noted that in the near future, the main thrust would be on consolidation and expansion of facilities in existing institutions. It further emphasized autonomy, redesigning of courses, support for quality research, better teaching methods and state-level councils to keep a close watch on standards, and take urgent steps to protect the system from degradation.

Subsequent to the announcement of the National Policy in 1986, the Government of India formulated the Programme of Action, which provided an indication of the nature of action required to be taken in order to implement the directions of the policy. The Programme of Action is the document that spells out strategies to achieve the

targets of the policy document assigning specific responsibilities for organizing, implementing and financing its proposals. In 1992, the NPE-1986 was further updated with substantial modifications. It provided a comprehensive policy framework for the development of education up to the end of the century, as well as a Plan of Action (PoA) 1992. After ten years of implementation of the policy, the review of NPE-1992 is now in progress.

Financing education

Since 1968, the goal of the government has been to keep aside 6 per cent of the national income for education as a whole, of which 10 per cent is the share for higher education. Paragraph 11.4 of NPE-1986 states "that the investment on education be gradually increased to reach a level of 6 per cent of the national income as early as possible".

In spite of resource constraints as well as competing priorities, the budgetary expenditure on education by central and state governments, as a percentage of Gross National Product (GNP), steadily increased from 0.8 per cent in 1951-1952 to 3.3 per cent in 1994-1995. The total budgetary expenditure on education by the education departments of central and state governments increased from Rs.644.6 million in 1951-1952 to Rs.300,000 million in 1995-1996. In terms of its share in total budgetary expenditure, education increased from 7.9 per cent in 1951-1952 to 11.1 per cent in 1995-1996. However, allocation to higher education within the total education budget has been on the decline.

The relative priority accorded to higher education can be measured in terms of the share of higher education in the GNP. Starting from a very low figure of 0.19 per cent of GNP invested in higher education in 1950-1951, the share of higher education increased

fivefold by 1980-1981. Since then, however, the allocation of resources has steadily decreased; it declined to 0.4 per cent of GNP by the mid-1990s.

Although India had planned to spend as much as 6 per cent of GNP on education, that level could not be reached because of competing priorities. Even within the overall budgetary provision for education, due to pressing larger demands from primary and secondary-school sectors, the total allocation for higher education since 1990 ranges from only 8 to 12 per cent. This constraint of public resources has made the government change its policy of only state funding of higher education and look for alternative and non-conventional sources to sustain the higher education system. Private higher education is the major option and hence governments promote it. However, care has been taken to establish appropriate regulatory mechanisms to assure that 'encouragement' is not equated to 'commercialization'.

The highlights discussed so far would indicate that the Indian system of higher education is complex, diverse and huge, and by and large of British origin. Universities have hardly changed their role and functioning in relation to the large number of colleges affiliated to them, which remain the major centres of higher education for the masses. It may appear that the system has become unwieldy, but well-conceived strategies of national policies have been successful to a large extent in maintaining a balance in the system. The emerging trends in higher education indicate that India's policies and strategies are responding well to national and international conditions. The next chapter discusses these trends.

II. EMERGING TRENDS IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Education, particularly higher education, as the instrument of individual, societal and economic transformation in India became well recognized in the second half of the twentieth century. Since independence in 1947, there have been larger investments in higher education, with the concomitant increase in the number of students who opt for higher education. While trying to meet the local problems of 'access' and 'equity', India also took note of the international dimension of education. These two trends – national needs and expectations of the international community – may seem to be conflicting but, interestingly, the 'receptivity to change' in the country has led to their complementarity. An analysis of changing conditions reveals that most of these changes are likely to permeate educational policies of the next few decades. This chapter discusses how some of the significant trends have culminated in the major trend of 'quality concern'.

Continuing quantitative expansion

For a long period, India did not have an organized way of educating its population. The *Gurukula* system was prevalent in India in ancient times, which rendered access to education very difficult for the common person. The organized system of education is a British legacy, introduced by the British in the middle of the nineteenth century. There was a progressive quantitative expansion of the system in the early part of the twentieth century, and at the time of independence in 1947 there were approximately 21 universities and 500 colleges in the country. *Table 1* indicates the quantitative expansion that took place during the post-independence era.

Table 1. Growth of institutions of higher education

Year	Number of universities	Number of colleges	Student enrolment in millions
1947	21	500	0.20
1950-1951	30	750	0.26
1960-1961	49	1,537	0.65
1970-1971	93	3,604	1.95
1980-1981	123	4,722	2.75
1990-1991	177	7,346	4.43
1995-1996	207	9,278	6.43
2000	274	12,600	8.00

Source: Annual Report of UGC: 1995-1996 and www.education.nic.in

Although the increase in the number of higher education institutions and student enrolment seems to be impressive, it is no different from the experience of other nations. Unlike in other countries, however, its impact is nullified due to the growing population. Quantitative expansion resulted in the increase in expenditure on higher education. Compared to the 1950s, per-student expenditure has also increased considerably. In spite of the steep increase in student enrolment, in the number of institutions and consequent expenditure on higher education, the higher education system caters to only 6 per cent of the relevant age group. The need to bring in a higher percentage under the umbrella of higher education, to promote human resources development, is well understood.

Growth in numbers has also caused concern about quality-related issues. With the number of new institutions of higher education rising each year, there is apprehension about the standard of facilities available in these institutions, the quality of educational experiences

offered, and problems associated with the affiliating functions of universities, etc.

Change in funding policy for higher education

India has the second largest system of higher education and its per capita income is one of the lowest in the world. The government has been the major source of funding for higher education and funding from other sources, such as student fees and endowments, has been on the decline. In the context of ongoing economic reforms, the major problem that confronts decision-makers today is how to financially sustain the system. The changing policy of the government on subsidizing higher education - trying to reduce subsidies - further accentuates this problem. In order to restrict spending on education, there is an attempt to treat higher education less favourably than primary education on the grounds that higher education is a non-merit good. *Table 2* gives details of the declining share of higher education in the total education budget.

Table 2. Plan expenditure on different sectors of education (percentage)

Sector	VI Plan 1980-1985	VII Plan 1985-1990	Plan Holiday	VIII Plan 1992-1997
Elementary education	33	37	37	47
Secondary education	21	24	22	18
Adult education	9	6	9	9
Higher education	22	16	12	8
Technical education	11	14	17	14
Others	4	3	2	4
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Government of India (1995), Budgetary resources for education (1951-1952 to 1993-1994): MHRD and www.education.nic.in

(Since 1951, India has completed ten five-year plans (development plans). Apart from the basic objectives of growth, self-reliance and social justice, each five-year plan takes into account new constraints and possibilities faced during that period and makes the necessary directional changes and emphasis. However, there were two periods where the five-year plans could not be implemented due to reasons such as pressure exerted on the economy, devaluation of the rupee and inflationary recession. Under such circumstances, annual plans euphemistically described as 'plan holiday' have been implemented.)

It is appreciated that the budgetary allocation for higher education in Plan IX (1997-2002) shows an increase to around 11 per cent. Nevertheless, it is still not in tune with requirements of the system. Limited resources available for higher education further accentuate quality-related issues mentioned above.

Change in stakeholder expectations

Explosion of knowledge and development in science and technology have resulted in the need for skilled personnel for different kinds of jobs, and have dictated the development of newer skills among the workforce. To keep pace with the growing

knowledge and skills, adults resort to continuing education. With the liberalization of economic activities, major corporations now enjoy complete freedom to have their operations and research facilities in India. This has made high-quality higher education indispensable. The employment sector also now considers human resources development as an investment. These changes have resulted in the demand for *lifelong flexible mode learning*. Higher education institutions have responded to these changes by bringing in more flexibility, quality and relevance in their curricula.

Many self-financing colleges have initiated need-based courses. Conventional universities have created distance education units and states have been encouraged to establish open universities to cater to the growing demand for continuing education. Today India has a national open school, a national open university, nine state open universities, and around 60 distance education units in traditional universities.

Apart from the university/college system, the private sector has also responded quickly to these demands. Some corporate groups with a nationwide network of supporting institutions and teaching centres remain outside the mainstream of formal institutions. They only offer diplomas and certificates. A typical example is the National Institute of Information Technology group of institutions. By law they are unauthorized to award degrees, but they are successful, nonetheless, in attracting students through the quality of their programmes and training. In both categories, those that provide need-based programmes and have succeeded in assuring the quality of their programmes are well accepted by parents, students and employers, as evidenced by enrolment and employment figures. Because of high tuition and other fees, only those with means can afford to benefit from these institutions and this situation has created tension among certain sections of the public.

Increasing private initiatives

Decreasing government financial support has resulted in private initiatives in higher education being encouraged. With the experience of flawed and ineffective public enterprises in many sectors, privatization of higher education is viewed as a strategy to reach higher levels of competitive efficiency, which also leads to higher expenses for students and parents who opt for the benefits of the educational services of private institutions. With a few exceptions, beneficiaries of these private initiatives critically evaluate the quality and worth of the educational services. Families that view this as 'the sharing of educational cost in the absence of government support are on the increase. It is expected that in years to come, these self-financing institutions will become increasingly competitive and make up a much larger proportion than grant-in-aid institutions. While such private initiatives are encouraged at the college level, there has been reluctance in starting private universities through legislation by successive central and state governments. There are various reasons for this, the chief one being the objection raised by many that the public would be exploited.

The growth pattern of private colleges in Andhra Pradesh, one of the southern Indian states, would indicate the general trend. There were only 50 undergraduate public colleges in this state in 1956. This number had risen to 801 by 1996-1997 and to 989 by 2000-2001. Of the 989 colleges, the government directly funds 176, 172 are aided (more than 95 per cent support from the government) and 641 are private colleges. It is obvious that private colleges total far more than the government and aided colleges combined.

Similarly, if one examines the growth of professional institutions, particularly colleges of engineering, one cannot help but notice to what extent private colleges are prevalent in the country. Andhra

Pradesh had 27 engineering colleges, both in university/government and private sectors in 1990. The numbers of engineering colleges in subsequent years were the following: 27 in 1991-1992, 32 in 1995-1996, 57 in 1996-1997, 89 in 1997-1998, 102 in 1998-1999 and 105 in 2000-2001. Of 105 engineering colleges functioning currently, only 12 are public and the remaining 93 are private colleges. As mentioned earlier, the policy of the government is to encourage private initiatives in higher education without giving room for commercialization.

While Private Higher Education (PHE) is encouraged in India, the perception of some neo-providers regarding higher education is a source of concern. Although good private initiatives function satisfactorily, there are instances of sub-standard institutions in arts and science disciplines being created, especially in rural areas. A visit to a typical rural self-financing arts and science college reveals the providers' perception of what is required to run a college. Half-finished buildings (waiting for the next batch of students to pay for further construction), underpaid but qualified staff to teach, and inadequate learning resources could be seen in many of those institutions.

Focus on science and technology

An analysis of the amount spent on science and technology, technical education and national facilities makes it clear that the role of technology and research in the country's prosperity has been well recognized. The government has always been the major source of funding for national facilities established outside the university system. The best of available human and other resources has been diverted to these national laboratories and national facilities. However, compared to developed countries, the investment in India is much less; not even 1 per cent of the GNP is spent on research and development in science and technology, while in developed countries

it would be 2-3 per cent of the GNP. Furthermore, a major portion of both state and centre funds supports applied and experimental research. However, support to technical education has been very generous. Per-student expenditure in technical institutions is as high as 13 times the per capita allocation in general universities. As much as 14 per cent of the total education budget (see *Table 2*) is spent on training several hundred thousand students in technical institutions.

Rethinking the role of universities

Alternative models of university management and changing roles of universities have been discussed for quite some time. Since independence, various committees have been appointed to review the system of higher education and formulate recommendations and strategies. The notable ones that were appointed before the formulation of NPE-1986 are the following:

- University Education Commission (1948-1949);
- Model Act for Universities (1964);
- Education Commission (1964-1966);
- Governance of Universities and Colleges (1971);
- Committee on reorganization of Calcutta University (1974);
- Committee on Visva Bharati (1975);
- Committee for enquiry into the working of central universities (1982);
- New Models of University Administration (1985).

These committees have voiced their concerns about the standards of higher education, autonomy of universities, the management structure and performance of universities. For example, the first commission on higher education in Independent India - University Education Commission - noted: "It is the primary duty of a university to maintain the highest standards of its teaching and examinations.

.../... Our universities should maintain the academic character of the work on a level recognized as adequate by universities of other countries." The Committee on Model Act for Universities emphasized the need to design a management structure that would protect the autonomy of universities. The recommendations of these committees and the policy perspectives have been considered in the formulation of the NPE-1986, which outlined a few major steps towards revamping the system of higher education, including restructuring the management pattern and evaluating the performance of universities.

Keeping in view the National Policy on Education-1986 and the Programme of Action, UGC appointed a committee in January 1987 under the convenership of Professor A. Gnanam, then vice-chancellor of Bharathidasan University (vice-chancellor of the University of Madras when the report was submitted in 1990), to review the management patterns and to set criteria for assessment of performance of educational institutions. Along with detailed recommendations on management patterns of institutions of higher education, the committee recommended that the performance of an academic institution should be evaluated at least after every three years by autonomous bodies comprising experts. The report noted: "We feel that the deficiency of the present system of management is the absence of any systematic method of reporting and evaluation of performance of the university. The society has invested precious resources in building up the great institutions of higher learning. It is entitled to demand that the members of the academic community individually and collectively be made accountable in concrete visible terms." The recommendations of this UGC report, popularly known as the Gnanam Committee Report (1990), are being given a new thrust by UGC to bring in desirable changes in the management of universities.

Perceptions of the role of the university had also changed by then. *It is expected that universities be directly involved in the transformation of society and its economic development through partnership activities and university-industry linkages. There is growing concern for the social commitment of universities. Universities are increasing student intake, course offerings, partnerships, non-traditional modes of learning, flexible lifelong learning initiatives etc. In the case of affiliating universities, their role in promoting the concept of academic autonomy for colleges and in providing academic leadership for quality enhancement (against mere monitoring) is being emphasized. Within a context of higher education gaining an international dimension, universities are expected to be sensitive to local, national and global expectations. In short, universities are expected to play a very different, dynamic, role than when the first three modern universities were established in India.*

The major trend: quality concern

The various dimensions of changing conditions and emerging trends discussed above - starting from 'mass higher education of comparable quality' to 'new models of management and performance evaluation' - have brought both quality and standards of higher education to the forefront. The need to move from 'ensuring minimum standards' towards 'assuring higher standards' is apparent. Today, performance evaluation, accountability and higher standards have become watchwords in any discussion on revamping higher education.

Among various national initiatives, consultations, discussions, and recommendations that gave direction and focus to developmental strategies in India, it was the National Policy on Education (1986)

that explicitly addressed the challenges of these trends. Expressing the concern for quality, the policy noted a few major steps that include the following:

- Excellence in performance of institutions and individuals will be recognized and rewarded. The emergence of sub-standard institutions will be checked. A climate conducive to excellence and innovation will be promoted with full involvement of the faculty.
- Select institutions will be awarded academic, administrative and financial autonomy of varying degrees, building in safeguards - with respect to accountability.

Under the section 'To make the system work', the policy document again identified that the strategy would consist in creating a system of performance appraisals of institutions according to standards and norms set at National or State levels. The implication was that while regulatory mechanisms could ensure only minimum standards, performance evaluation for higher standards of education recommended by NPE-1986 needed a different mechanism.

In fact, one of the terms of reference to Gnanam Committee was "to set criteria for assessment of performance of educational institutions". The report spelt out in detail the criteria for assessment and how performance evaluation should be done - assigning weightages to criteria, scoring and classification of institutions into six grades that range from A (80 per cent and above - outstanding) to F (below per cent - very poor). The report recommended that "institutions falling into the last three categories should be warned and the last category indication should stipulate that its performance will be surveyed for an additional year and if no improvement was made, it could be disaffiliated or closed. The D- & E-categories should be put on probation and closely watched for three years and helped

to come up to at least C. If they fail, closure may have to be considered. The A-category institutions should be specially rewarded by the provision of additional resources to enable their development along their desired channels. Category B should also deserve special attention." The committee observed that the aim of such exercises should be that within the course of 5 to 10 years no institution would remain below mid-level. It also recommended that as time passes the criteria and scoring could be made tighter so that institutions would always endeavour to remain 'above water'.

These developments and recommendations culminated in initiating steps towards establishing a mechanism over and above the regulatory measures and the establishment of an autonomous body for the performance evaluation of institutions was seen as a promising strategy. Meanwhile, consultations on the accreditation system had been in progress as parallel efforts since 1986, and as discussions strengthened, as illustrated in the next chapter, the result was the establishment of NAAC.

III. THE BREAKTHROUGH IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Indian system of higher education has many built-in regulatory mechanisms to ensure the minimum standards of higher education. UGC, affiliating universities, state governments, funding agencies and professional bodies are the active agencies that implement these traditional mechanisms. Policy recommendation on the national body for accreditation was based on the expectation that it would lead to 'improvement in quality and standards' – that which was not achieved effectively by the regulatory mechanisms. This chapter discusses built-in checks and balances that already exist in the system and the emergence of the national quality-assurance body, beyond these regulatory measures.

Checks that already exist

The University Grants Commission (UGC), by virtue of the statutory powers conferred on it, is expected to develop effective mechanisms for quality control of institutions. Section 12 of the UGC Act of 1956 specifically requires UGC to be responsible for "the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examinations and research in universities". Towards fulfilling this mandate, UGC has evolved various monitoring mechanisms for quality control, which directly or indirectly look into the need and eligibility criteria for the establishment of institutions, and evaluate the fitness of those established to receive financial support. For instance, *UGC Regulations, 1985*, are on the *Minimum standards of instruction for the grant of the first degree through formal education*. These regulations concern working days, working hours, attendance requirements, supplementation of lectures by tutorials and/or

problem-solving sessions, term papers, nature of evaluation, workload of teachers and several related matters. Similarly there are *regulations for the non-formal/distance education mode*.

The introduction of the *National Eligibility Test*, commonly known by its acronym NET, is in keeping with the attempt to establish higher standards of teaching. It is a nationwide test conducted in different subjects based on syllabi prescribed by UGC, to certify the minimum capability of those who aspire to become teachers in higher education. NET has been conducted by the UGC since 1989 for eligibility for lectureship. Around 50,000 students appear for the test every year. Pass percentage is around 5 per cent. Eight State-Level Tests known as SLETs have been accredited at par with NET. Only those who pass that test are eligible for teaching positions in higher education institutions. Institutions that do not comply with these guidelines are not eligible for financial support from UGC. Similar nationwide tests have been introduced to provide research fellowships to students who opt for research.

Apart from the mandatory mechanisms, UGC initiates special schemes to enrich quality of education. The inter-university centres set up by UGC is a noteworthy effort towards providing common facilities and inputs in chosen areas of education and research, since heavy investment in infrastructure is beyond the reach of the individual university. According to Section 12-CCC of the UGC Act, UGC may establish "*institutions for providing common facilities, services or programmes for a group of universities or for the universities in general and maintain such institutions or provide for their maintenance by allocating and disbursing out of the Fund of the Commission such grants as the Commission may deem necessary*" (UGC Act, 1956, p. 11). The following inter-university centres were established during the VII and VIII Plan periods:

- Nuclear Science Centre (1984), New Delhi;

- Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, Pune (1988);
- Inter-University Consortium for DAE Facilities, Indore (1989);
- Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC), New Delhi (1991);
- Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET) (established in a project mode in 1991 and incorporated as a society in 1996), Ahmedabad.

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council was established in 1994 along the lines of the inter-university centres. In addition to inter-university centres, UGC has set up the following national facilities:

- Western Regional Instrumentation Centre, Mumbai (1978);
- Regional Instrumentation Centre, Bangalore (1978);
- National Centre for Science Information, Bangalore (1983);
- Information Centre, Mumbai (1986);
- Information Centre, Baroda (1989);
- Crystal Growth Centre, Chennai (1990);
- MST Radar Centre, Tirupati (1991);
- Inter-University Centre for Humanities and Social Sciences, Shimla (1991);
- Eastern Centre for Research in Astrophysics (1993).

These inter-university centres and national facilities help universities to improve the quality of learning, teaching and research by providing information resources and facilities for research, library networking, audiovisual communication, etc. *Academic Staff Colleges* are another unique experiment to reorient in-service teachers through orientation and refresher courses. Establishment of curriculum development centres, UGC panels on subject areas in 27 subjects, examination reforms and question banks are other measures through which UGC is trying to enhance the quality of

higher education. In addition, financial assistance is given under various schemes such as special assistance for research, automation of libraries, electronic networking of libraries or audiovisual research centres, after a thorough appraisal of the potential of the institution to implement the schemes satisfactorily.

In addition, UGC appoints various committees with specific terms of reference towards maintaining and improving the standards of higher education. For example, the Committee on New Models of University Management was appointed to review the management patterns and to set criteria for assessment of performance of educational institutions. The Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council was to make recommendations regarding setting up the accreditation council. UGC also initiates and/or supports projects similar to Dr Sukumaran Nair's project for evolving an Action Plan cum Project Report for Setting up the Accreditation Agency.

The affiliating function of universities for assembling, that is highlighted in the first chapter, ensures that minimum criteria are fulfilled by the affiliates. As mentioned earlier, even in the case of colleges that enjoy academic autonomy, the parent university awards the degree and hence has evolved various methods to ensure the objective of providing higher education is satisfactorily met within those colleges. The growth in the number of affiliates has nonetheless reduced the role of academic leadership of universities to mere monitoring of minimum requirements.

State governments, which are the major providers of state universities and colleges of the respective states, have their annual audit and review mechanisms. However, the responsibility of these providers is limited to overseeing the monitoring mechanisms of the financial and academic audit in order to be themselves satisfied that the minimum requirements have been met.

Apart from review committees, inspections and internal regulatory mechanisms in the UGC/University/Colleges chain, professional bodies play a significant role in licensing, after having ensured quality in professional areas such as medicine, engineering, law, education and agriculture. While the University Grants Commission is responsible for co-ordination, determination and maintenance of overall standards, as well as for the release of grants to some institutions, professional bodies are responsible for certification of professional programmes and authorization of candidates to practise their profession. Some of them provide grants under specific heads and make recommendations to funding agencies. There are more than 30 such bodies of which the following have been made statutory in India for various considerations:

- All India Council for Technical Education;
- Bar Council of India;
- Central Council of Homeopathy;
- Central Council of Indian Medicine;
- Dentist Council of India;
- Distance Education Council;
- Indian Council for Agriculture Research;
- Indian Nursing Council;
- Medical Council of India;
- National Council for Teacher Education;
- Pharmacy Council of India;
- Rehabilitation Council of India.

In 1998, some of these councils attempt to establish their own accreditation bodies. The All India Council for Technical Education, which is the co-ordinating apex body for technical education, established the National Board of Accreditation under the provisions incorporated in its Act, with the basic structure and function to accredit programmes offered by technical institutions all over the

country. Programme accreditation is voluntary and the National Board of Accreditation has accredited something like 400 programmes in engineering and management so far. The Accreditation Board of the Indian Council for Agriculture Research accredits agricultural institutions.

Need for new initiative

In spite of the built-in regulatory mechanisms and schemes to promote standards of higher education mentioned above, criticism of the deterioration in standards has been mounting. One of the major criticisms concerned the inadequacy of the affiliating system already mentioned. This system became effective when the number of affiliated colleges was less and the number of courses also limited. The best model for guiding a group of colleges through one nodal academic body was perhaps when a university had to manage only 20 to 30 affiliates. In fact, the UGC recommendation is that a parent university may have no more than 30 affiliates. Today, with 274 universities and 12,600 colleges, this proportion may seem to be correct. One should remember that certain unitary universities do not have affiliating functions. Furthermore, a geographical jurisdiction is defined for each university, which leads to disparity in numbers. Universities – e.g. Pondicherry University – have less than 30 affiliates and are fine with affiliating functions. While the University of Hyderabad has no affiliates, an established university like Osmania University, also in the city of Hyderabad, has 400-odd affiliates. When the number increases, the parent university may cope well with the demands of affiliating functions but the academic leadership, which it must provide to its affiliate, cannot be achieved meaningfully with such an unfair ratio.

The growth in numbers is also reflected in student enrolment, faculty involved and the number of programmes offered. The Indian

system of higher education is the second largest in the world, catering to 8 million students through 0.4 million teachers. With this growth in size, the explosion of knowledge and information technology has led to micro specialization and a host of new interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary areas. Hundreds of course combinations have evolved. The nomenclature of different combinations varies greatly and the name of the award means little. An increasingly large number of institutions are being established on private initiatives, which continues to concern part of the public. In sum, with the growth in numbers, associated problems have increased and as a result the regulatory function has permitted institutions of higher education with sub-standard facilities to emerge.

Two major points came forth during various discussions on maintaining and promoting the standards of Indian higher education. One line of thinking was about facilitating more academic autonomy that would enable potential institutions to be more creative and innovative – enhancing quality and standards of higher education. The implication is that autonomy should be given as soon as the potential is proven. The other line of discussion was on putting into place effective quality controls that would check the sub-standard institutions, thus ensuring their quality and standards. By the late 1980s it emerged that accreditation could serve both of these purposes.

Moreover, the accreditation policy forms part of a reform which must be viewed as a whole and whose other important aspects include the provision for autonomy of colleges. As noted by the report of the Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council: "While the central motive to the accreditation system has come from the requirements of college autonomy, it also answers the need for a systematic and regular means of assurance that colleges and universities are functioning effectively".

Many committees on education have recommended 'academic freedom' to deserving colleges and this concept found a due place in the Report of the University Education Commission (1948). It was further reiterated in the Kothari Commission of 1966. The Committee on Colleges (1964) noted that: "One of the practical methods of improving higher education in India would be to select a few colleges on the basis of their past work, influence, traditions, maturity and academic standards and give them an autonomous status with freedom to develop their personalities, experiment with new ideas, frame their own syllabus in consultation with the university, devise and conduct examinations and initiate new measures". The Committee on Standards of University Education (1965) reiterated that: "In an affiliating system, the weak colleges tend to determine the policy of the university with regard to the course of study, teaching requirements, examinations etc. Good colleges, which are capable of rising to a much higher standard, are consequently not allowed to do so. Unless these colleges which can do better than the rest are permitted to go ahead with their plans for modernizing and improving their academic programmes, they will not be in a position to hold on to the superior standards indefinitely".

The Education Commission Report (1964-1966) recommended that: "Where there is an outstanding college (or a small cluster of very good colleges) within a large university, which has shown the capacity to improve itself markedly, consideration should be given to granting it an autonomous status. This would involve the power to frame its own rules of admission, to prescribe its course of study, to conduct examinations and so on. The parent university's role will be one of general supervision and the actual conferment of the degree".

In view of the recommendations of various committees, to overcome the problem of outdated and inflexible structure of the affiliating system, the concept of autonomous colleges was conceived

by UGC. UGC's Recommendations (1973) stated that: "Academic autonomy has always been regarded as a fundamental necessity for institutions of higher education. The conspicuous absence of this academic freedom and institutional autonomy in the case of colleges in India has been the greatest dysfunctional factor responsible for the gradual decline in standards".

While according academic freedom to deserving colleges was still discussed, equal concern was strongly expressed about the universities. The major concern for universities was their achievement not being proportionate to the time, effort and intellectual resources expended on them. The major cause of this condition was attributed to the manner of their governance. There were also concerns expressed about protecting the autonomy of universities. The committee on 'Model Act for Universities' observed that university autonomy should be considered as an essential prerequisite for ensuring academic excellence and the Acts of the universities should be so designed as to strengthen their autonomous character. The MHRD document "*Challenge of education - A policy perspective*" [1985], stated that universities should be truly autonomous and accountable. There was a growing consensus that academic institutions may only function well when they enjoy substantial intellectual autonomy and that the designing of a suitable system for motivating institutions of higher education will help them to be creative and innovative.

Accordingly, a scenario evolved which required quality controls over and above existing built-in checks which would serve two purposes - ensure quality of a higher level and assure the potential of institutions to continue to do so. The above considerations strongly argued the need for setting up a specialized initiative for ensuring and enhancing quality. It was felt that UGC could not do much for these purposes because of the absence of a specialized

system within and, in addition, such a mechanism would need more autonomy. Consequently, the PoA-1986 stated: *"As a part of its responsibility for the maintenance and promotion of standards of education, the UGC will, to begin with, take the initiative to establish an Accreditation and Assessment Council as an autonomous body"*. It is in the above context that UGC initiated measures for setting up a quality-assurance agency under its Act. It was expected that the creation of an autonomous national agency with sufficient expertise and credibility, would not only control the quality of higher education, but would also motivate educational institutions to strive for excellence. However, it was not an easy task. Evolving a mechanism acceptable to the majority of the system needed careful deliberations and consultations at both national and international levels. More or less eight years (1986-1994) were spent on this developmental stage, which is explained in the following pages.

Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council

In 1986, UGC constituted a 15-member Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council under the chairpersonship of Dr Vasant Gowarikar, then Secretary of the Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India. The terms of reference of the committee were: *to make recommendations regarding setting up an Accreditation and Assessment Council in order to develop a mechanism for maintenance and in view of raising the quality of institutions of higher education while keeping in view the objectives, uses and various methods/procedures that are currently being followed by different countries or that can be adopted.*

This committee established a sub-committee, with Dr Vasant Gowarikar as its convener, with a view to producing a working paper under the above terms of reference. After significant discussion on

various aspects of assessment of educational institutions, a working group was set up to prepare a draft document suggesting practical steps towards setting up the Assessment and Accreditation Council. The draft report thus prepared was placed before the main committee on 9 December 1987. The main committee accepted the report and submitted it to UGC. The report dealt with the following aspects:

- (a) management of higher education and its shortcomings;
- (b) process of accreditation, its objects and methodology of working;
- (c) assessment of institutional effectiveness in each of the principal areas of institutional activity and responsibility;
- (d) steps towards an accreditation system in India and how to organize the process;
- (e) linkages with other accrediting agencies and development of the National Test Service.

The Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council conceived the accreditation agency to be a self-financing institution whose recurring expenditure should be met entirely from membership fees paid by member-institutions. It noted that initial expenditure on setting up the Accreditation Council should be met by UGC for a period of three years. The report outlined a few strong measures on linking accreditation with central funds (funding through UGC or directly through various funding schemes of the central government - more details of state and central funding are given in *Chapter 1*). The notable ones are given below.

- (a) State governments will continue to be free to found, charter or recognize, and fund new institutions, but these institutions will receive no central funds until they become accredited. Funding, development or support of as yet unaccredited state institutions will be entirely the concern of the states.

- (b) For the founding of a new central institution, separate funds will be allocated to sustain it until it wins accreditation.
- (c) Within five years of the setting up of the Accreditation Council, only accredited institutions will be eligible for central funding. Some painful decisions will have to be made, but if there is to be any meaning in an accreditation system, it must be operated with great integrity, and therefore there must be no exceptions.

The report also recommended the closure of non-accredited institutions. It commented that if a central institution failed to win accreditation, even after a reasonable period of time and investment of funds, the Accreditation Council would recommend its closure. "There are a variety of causes which will keep an institution from obtaining accreditation ... in most cases, what is required concerns reorganization and/or some additional finances, but not a very substantial expansion of faculty and facilities. However, some institutions are simply too small to be able to offer a satisfactory educational programme ... in such cases, consolidation with other institutions would be called for". Afterwards, when the accreditation agency was formed, many of these recommendations were modified substantially.

UGC considered this report and made the following decisions:

- (a) the report should be widely circulated among academics;
- (b) national and regional seminars should be convened to discuss the report;
- (c) academics' comments should be placed before the commission, along with recommendations of these seminars.

Dr Sukumaran Nair's Action Plan cum Project Report

The report of the Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council, often referred to as Vasant Gowarikar's report, was

deliberated at nine regional seminars held at the Universities of Andhra, Annamalai, Gauhati, Kalyani, Lucknow, Mysore, Pune, Punjab and Rajasthan and at the national-level seminar held at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. It resulted in Dr Sukumaran Nair's document (1990). Apart from those organized at Kalyani and Gauhati Universities, all workshops, in addition to the national seminar, strongly favoured the development of a system for assessment of institutions of higher education under the auspices of UGC. The national seminar also reiterated that the accreditation system should enjoy reasonable autonomy in its structure and functioning. The seminar further suggested that the new system should be set up in such a way as to achieve maximum acceptance and credibility.

Based on the consensus arrived at before the closure of the national and other regional deliberations, UGC requested Dr A. Sukumaran Nair, then pro-vice-chancellor of the University of Kerala, to submit a project report on the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education. The report submitted in December 1990 contained comments on the following:

- (a) Gowariker's report;
- (b) the concept of accreditation;
- (c) major functions of accreditation;
- (d) objectives and functions of the accreditation system in the Indian context;
- (e) management of the accreditation system – its administrative and organizational patterns;
- (f) linkages with professional bodies;
- (g) modalities of accreditation and the rating scale to be used for assessing institutions.

There are many major aspects in which the consensus arrived to, at the national consultations, that was reflected in the report, that

differed from the recommendations of the Vasant Gowarikar's committee. Dr Sukumaran Nair's report, entitled "Action Plan cum Project Report for setting up the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education", emphasized that assessment and accreditation should be an enabling mechanism towards self-improvement. The Action Plan specifically mentioned that accreditation should be done "with special emphasis placed on 'institutional and system improvement' rather than on 'fault finding' or 'condemnation'". It differed from the recommendation of the Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council in linking assessment outcome with funding. The Project report clearly noted: "Accreditation is conceived essentially as the certification of overall quality of an institution on the basis of its comprehensive and systematic assessment by competent professionals. The accreditation procedure will help an institution to go well beyond the minimum requirements and standards by providing operational and realistic models of excellence. It is not presumed that accreditation is linked with grant-in-aids or other types of financial support or assistance, or that it depends on recognition by UGC or any other agency. Accreditation should be seen as a matter of institutional reputation and academic standing, and should be viewed not as an administrative requirement for its functioning, but as a matter of institutional prestige. It may be seen as a recognition and reward for the work that it has done in the past, on the one hand, and as an incentive for further improvement, on the other".

While Vasant Gowarikar's report was not very specific about the type of assessment outcome, and in a way supported the two-point scale of accredited/not-accredited status, the consensus of the national consultation was to prefer a five-point grade. Both the reports proposed, however, that an autonomous agency take care of accreditation, the earlier report envisaging a membership of agencies of accredited institutions to be supported by UGC for the first three years. The later report also subscribed to autonomy but recommended

that the agency be accountable to UGC. After such profusion of agreements and disagreements in recommendations, the consensus was to establish the accreditation agency as an autonomous body under UGC's provision.

Committee on new models of university management

By 1990, the committee on new models of university management submitted its report that stipulated in detail how to set criteria for performance evaluation of institutions and how to use the outcome to promote higher standards.

Policy revision in 1992

Meanwhile, the National Policy on Education (1986) underwent substantial revision. The revised policy document (1992) also emphasized the need for all-round improvement in institutions and proposed that the main emphasis should be put on consolidation and expansion of facilities in existing institutions. It stressed the necessity to take urgent steps to protect the system from degradation, and the strategy that had been identified in the policy document (1986) for the performance appraisal of institutions was reiterated in order to make the system work. In March 1992, based on the outcome of earlier efforts put forth in this regard, UGC resolved to set up a National Accreditation Board as an autonomous body for the achievement of the objectives envisaged in the NPE.

The Memorandum of Association and Rules and Regulations of the accreditation board were submitted to UGC in January 1994. Towards the end of July 1994, UGC established an empowered committee under the chairpersonship of Professor G. Ram Reddy, Chairperson, UGC to finalize the memorandum of association and rules and regulations of the accreditation board. The document,

prepared after taking into consideration existing methods of quality assessment and quality control of higher education in Australia, Canada, the UK and the USA, and also the higher education scenario in India, was considered and approved by the empowered committee on 7 September, 1994. It culminated in the establishment of the body: *National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)*.

Concerted efforts were made to evolve the accreditation system in a manner that has valuable lessons for others. Special committees that worked on the accreditation strategy could chart a clear rationale for the conceptual framework and major elements of the strategy. National consultations could reflect on the merits and demerits of the recommended strategy. Considering the consensus of national deliberations, the action plan could take it from there to spell out the operational details of the strategy. Educational leaders, policy-makers and academia that were involved at various stages strengthened the accreditation system. In brief, the careful and participative way of evolving the mechanism has worked well.

Governance of NAAC

NAAC was established as an autonomous body, under Section 12-CCC of the UGC Act 1956, and registered at Bangalore on 16 September 1994 under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act of 1960 and Karnataka Societies Registration Rules of 1961. Its working is controlled by a General Council (GC) and an Executive Committee (EC) comprising senior academics and educational administrators from universities, colleges and professional bodies and representatives from organizations such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), the Ministry of Human Resources Development, and the Association of Indian Universities. The first GC was composed of 11 members and by 1996, NAAC had its full GC of 35 members, drawn from different sectors of higher education, to steer its policy decisions.

When NAAC was established, various committees and the NPE-1986 consciously recommended it be an independent body. The MoA was framed, keeping in mind the special needs of the external quality assurance body. The MoA and the by-laws of the inter-university centres, already established by UGC as autonomous bodies, were adapted to suit the specific requirements of NAAC, giving more freedom to NAAC than to the inter-university centres. The 'difference in governance structure' and the special status given to NAAC were soon questioned. Consequently, UGC suggested that the MoA of NAAC might be amended in line with the inter-university centres. However, the general opinion of the GC and EC was that NAAC should continue to be on a different footing.

While these discussions were going on, the first director of NAAC left the organization to become vice-chancellor of a reputed university. Following the procedure laid down in the by-laws, which states that: "The director shall be appointed by the GC on the recommendations of a search committee constituted by the chairperson, NAAC", the GC went ahead to choose the next director. There was a difference of opinion among GC members on the choice, which resulted in an intervention by UGC. UGC's intervening was questioned by several GC members and to avoid legal complications, UGC strongly advised NAAC to amend its MoA in line with that of inter-university centres. The MoA and Rules and Regulations were subsequently amended to remove the differences in the governance structure of NAAC.

As detailed in the MoA (2000), the chairperson of UGC shall also be the president of the GC of NAAC. The chairperson of EC shall be an eminent academician in the area of relevance to NAAC; he/she will be nominated by the President of GC from among three members to be identified by the search committee for this purpose. Both EC and GC shall have members in the following three categories:

1. Ex-officio members from organizations such as MHRD, UGC and Association of Indian Universities.
2. Ex-officio members from other quality-assurance agencies of the country on a reciprocal basis.
3. Nominated members from among vice-chancellors, principals, teachers, experts from industry and other sectors nominated by GC/UGC/MHRD. Nominated members will have a term of three years.

The executive officer of NAAC is the director, with the status of a central university vice-chancellor, who is its academic and administrative head, and is the member-secretary of both GC and EC. NAAC has a core staff and consultants. In addition, it receives assistance from a large number of academics and educational administrators.

The autonomous stature of NAAC and its relationship with UGC should be mentioned here. Although NAAC was established under the UGC Act, it functions with full autonomy through its EC and GC. The amendment to the MoA was only meant to safeguard the functioning of NAAC from legal complications, though it continues to be a contentious issue and there are arguments for and against it. In principle and practice, the chairperson of UGC becoming the president of NAAC has not affected the role of EC, which is the decision-making body. GC generally meets once a year and if there are decisions that could be taken only by GC, e.g. amendment in the MoA, a special GC is later convened. The president of NAAC presides over the GC meetings and all EC members are also in the GC, thus maintaining the link between EC's decisions and GC's deliberations. So far, there has not been any conflict between decisions made by EC or GC. Furthermore, NAAC does not act as an arm of UGC or of the central government; the triad complements the efforts of each other in promoting quality in higher education. One has to wait and see

whether this harmony will continue or whether the amendment will lead to controversial situations.

The role of UGC in the functioning of NAAC has also been smooth without any major conflict. However, there had been instances where the initiatives of UGC have been perceived as encroachment into the autonomy of NAAC by some of the EC members and in the recent meeting of the Executive Committee of NAAC held on 15 May 2002, regaining the autonomy of NAAC has been taken up as a priority item.

When an accreditation system is established, decisions on the extent of autonomy of the accreditation agency and its relationship with government or the funding agency require a careful and futuristic approach. Once a decision is made, of course after thoughtful discussions, it would be preferable not to change that stand to maintain the credibility of the system. An assurance to stakeholders about the independent and autonomous nature of the accreditation agency is very important to uphold the confidence of stakeholders in self-improvement.

Scope and role

The objective of NAAC as envisaged in the MoA is to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning in India - universities, colleges and/or one or more of their units, i.e. departments, schools, institutions, programmes, etc. The main objectives of assessment and accreditation are to:

1. grade institutions of higher education and their programmes;
2. stimulate the academic environment and quality of teaching and research in these institutions;
3. help institutions realize their academic objectives;
4. promote necessary changes, innovations and reforms in all aspects of the institutions working for the above purpose;

5. encourage innovations, self-evaluation and accountability in higher education.

The MoA also clearly spelt out criteria for assessment as follows:

1. organization and governance;
2. infrastructure facilities;
3. quality of teaching and learning;
4. curriculum design and review;
5. support services;
6. student services;
7. sources, adequacy and management of financial resources;
8. publications and consultancy/extension activities;
9. any other aspect the Executive Committee of NAAC would like to examine.

Although the MoA provided some guidelines on criteria for assessment for the accreditation council to start with, when the assessment procedures were actually implemented, these criteria were fine-tuned to ten parameters. Based on field experience with ten institutions, the ten parameters were revised subsequently and reduced to the number of seven.

Furthermore, the MoA stated that NAAC shall perform the following:

- ensure that criteria are reviewed periodically, revised and updated as and when considered necessary in the light of experience gained through their application and through development of techniques and modalities of assessment;
- ensure that criteria are objective and, to the extent possible, quantifiable;
- ensure that criteria are publicized widely, particularly in the academic community;

- arrange for periodic assessment and grading of institutions of higher education and of its units and/or specific academic programmes or projects;
- communicate the results of assessment and grading to the concerned institution in a form and manner appropriate for corrective action, rectification and self-improvement;
- help and encourage institutions to develop their own procedures, techniques and modalities for self-evaluation;
- initiate research studies in planning and evaluation of educational institutions, programmes, etc.;
- ensure an optimized use of resources and the achievement of identified goals of institutions of higher learning;
- establish regional branches as and when necessary to ensure the smooth conduct of assessment and accreditation.

Care has been taken to ensure that NAAC's process is ameliorative and enabling rather than punitive or judgemental. If we consider the assessment continuum and list the extremes (see below) it is evident that NAAC's process has been evolved in such a manner so as to stress a positive approach, which is more enabling than judgemental:

1. inspection *v.* assessment;
2. minimum standards *v.* standards of excellence;
3. fault finding *v.* institutional improvement;
4. sitting above *v.* sitting beside;
5. fragmentary *v.* holistic;
6. impressionistic *v.* databased;
7. subjective *v.* objective;
8. informal *v.* systematic;
9. looking at the past *v.* looking to the future;
10. suspicion *v.* trust;
11. incompetence *v.* competence;
12. weaknesses *v.* strengths.

In this continuum, NAAC's process of assessment is towards an experience that is holistic, objective, systematic, databased, transparent and shared, and that contributes to institutional improvement. To carry out these responsibilities, appropriate instruments and methodology were evolved after a series of national-level discussions and international consultations. National conditions as well as international trends have been considered and the outcome is a methodology that suits the Indian context and at the same time incorporates all of the critical elements of international expectations. It is an exercise based on mutual trust; the details of the exercise are explained in the next chapter.

IV. THE INSTRUMENT AND METHODOLOGY

While it is essential to evolve the methodology to suit the national context, it is equally essential to ensure that it is in line with international trends. This conviction has been at the forefront in all efforts NAAC has taken so far; the larger picture for accreditation included acceptability at the international level and taking a lead in some of the uncharted areas. Balancing both of these responsibilities, NAAC evolved its methodology and fine-tuned the instruments. The clear understanding of 'Who will do the assessment? What will they assess? How will they assess? What are the roles and responsibilities of the council in the assessment?' has significant implications for the methodology. It also forms the basis to build the necessary support structure for running the accreditation exercise smoothly. This chapter discusses these details.

An analysis of current practices of national accrediting agencies of different countries reveals a great deal of diversity. They vary in structure and function. Variations can also be seen in their methodology, nature of the process (mandatory or voluntary), unit of assessment (institution or programme), outcome and policy on disclosure of the outcome (confidential or public). In spite of the variance, the process of external quality assurance worldwide has the following critical elements in common:

- independent nature of the accrediting body;
- assessment based on pre-determined criteria;
- combination of self-study and peer reviews;
- safeguards and protocols to guide peer assessment;

- public disclosure of the outcome – the extent of public disclosure varies from disclosure of only the final outcome to disclosure of the full assessment report.

This is the accepted methodology of most national agencies that are members of INQAAHE. In line with the international trend, NAAC follows the following three-stage process for accrediting a unit of assessment:

- preparation and submission of the self-study report by the unit of assessment;
- on-site visit of the peer team for validation of the report and recommendation of the assessment outcome to NAAC;
- final decision by the Executive Council of NAAC.

Unit of assessment

The MoA of NAAC clearly spells out its objective *to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning in India: universities and colleges or one or more of their units, i.e. departments, schools, institutions, programmes, etc.* The same methodology, as given above, is followed for both institutional and departmental accreditation. Institutional accreditation focuses on the performance of the institution in terms of its policies, facilitating aspects, healthy practices and the overall health of the institution. Departmental accreditation focuses on how effectively and efficiently the department under study functions, to offer teaching programmes and contribute to its area of knowledge. It also lays emphasis on the standing and achievement of the department in a subject *per se*.

While institutional accreditation is open to both universities and colleges, departmental accreditation is open only to university departments. During the first phase of assessment, NAAC consciously

promoted institutional accreditation, which led to a mixed response from the system. Faculty and heads of institutions were fearful that *holistic assessment will put donkeys and horses together*. They argued that by giving a single institutional grade, non-performing departments would be protected whereas good departments might not be motivated to support institutional accreditation. However, when the rationale for promoting institutional accreditation was explained, most of them realized the need for assessment of the *whole* system before launching assessment of subunits.

A small percentage of educationists are still not convinced of the merits of institutional accreditation. The points that emerge during NAAC's dialogue with them, however, are of value to anyone who might examine the experience of other countries for a suitable model of quality assurance. The debate on institutional accreditation is discussed in the next chapter.

Although there are many reasons for promoting institutional accreditation, NAAC has recognized that institutional and department/programme assessment are not alternatives and that there should be a place for review of whole institutions as well as of individual subjects. Even the opponents of institutional accreditation accept this point of view. In fact, many supporters of departmental accreditation strongly believe that institutional accreditation should precede departmental accreditation. NAAC's experience shows that the balance between the two must be handled carefully.

The Academic Advisory Committee of NAAC advises NAAC on such issues. It is a statutory body "created for the purpose of monitoring and promoting the activities of NAAC with reference to publication, selection and shaping of instruments of Assessment and Accreditation, modalities of operation in charge and rules, regulation and guidelines". In a recent meeting, the methodology for departmental

accreditation was discussed. The committee recommended that criteria for assessment, the grading pattern and methodology of self-study with peer review could be the same for both institutional and departmental accreditation, but with a difference in focus. However, NAAC is yet to carry out any departmental accreditation and the series of discussions that have been initiated on departmental accreditation have not yielded as yet a conclusive pattern. The following discussion is based on the experience of institutional accreditation.

Criteria for assessment

At present, seven criteria: curricular aspects; teaching/learning and evaluation; research, consultancy and extension; infrastructure and learning resources; student support and progression; organization and management; healthy practices - form the basis for assessment. Field experience with the first batch of institutions (that were assessed under the earlier pattern of 10 parameters) has brought in clarity on aspects that are to be covered under these criteria. Some highlights of the criteria are given below:

Curricular aspects: This criterion requires information on how the curriculum design of the institution offers diversity and flexibility to learners. It also seeks information on the practices of the institution in initiating and redesigning courses that are relevant to regional and national needs.

Teaching/learning and evaluation: This criterion deals with the efforts of the institution in providing appropriate teaching/learning experiences to learners. It also looks at the adequacy and competency of the faculty who handle the various programmes of study, as well as the efficiency of the evaluation methodology of the institution.

Research, consultancy and extension: This criterion seeks information on activities of the institution with reference to research,

consultancy and extension. It also deals with the facilitating aspects of the institution to promote the same and their outcome.

Infrastructure and learning resources: This criterion requires data on adequate and optimal use of facilities available in the institution to maintain the quality of the academic and other aspects of campus life. It also seeks information on how every constituent of the institution – students, teachers and staff – benefits from these facilities.

Student support and progression: The highlights of this criterion are the efforts of the institution to provide necessary assistance for good student experiences on campus and to facilitate their progression. It also seeks information on student and alumni profiles.

Organization and management: This criterion requires data on policies and practices of the institution in its planning, human resources, requirement, recruitment, training, performance appraisal and finance management.

Healthy practices: This criterion focuses on innovative and unique practices of the institution that add to its academic ambience. They may include:

- educational innovations;
- working with a specific mission and goals;
- master plan for institutional growth;
- feedback from stakeholders for improvement of institutional functions;
- innovations in management and communication;
- quality-enhancement strategies.

If input from the institution is collated under these criteria, it should give adequate details on all of an institution's features such as its policies, practices, programmes, resources and performance.

This would facilitate the institution to appraise itself of its standing, besides helping the assessment team make a proper assessment.

In practice, an institution that wishes to volunteer for assessment should send a letter of intent to NAAC with the basic details of its eligibility. Only institutions that are recognized either by UGC or by a recognized university (in the case of colleges) are eligible to volunteer. In addition, the institution should have either been in existence for at least five years or sent out at least two batches of students after programme completion. One should remember that NAAC's process is not a recognition or approval mechanism. Recognition as an institution of higher education is a prerequisite to volunteer for accreditation. Moreover, an institution may need at least five years to overcome initial problems and prove its potential. After verifying the eligibility to undergo assessment when NAAC accepts the letter of intent, the next stage for the institution is to prepare a self-study report about its functioning, along the guidelines given by NAAC.

Preparation of self-study report

The first and most important step in the process of assessment is the submission of the self-study report to NAAC. NAAC believes that an institution that really understands itself – its strengths and weaknesses, its potentials and limitations – is more likely to be successful in carrying out its educational mission than the establishment that does not have such self-awareness. Self-study is thus envisaged as the backbone of the process of assessment. It is through the self-study report that the peer team tries to understand and tentatively evaluate the institution prior to visiting the institution.

The self-study report is not to be understood as a mere compilation of data on the functioning of the institution. In fact, NAAC insists

that the report contain two parts. Part I may contain data about the institution under the seven criteria for assessment for which NAAC has developed a format. Based on the data collected in Part I, the institution is expected to analyze its functioning and performance, and self-analysis becomes Part II of the self-study report. NAAC has evolved clear guidelines to help institutions prepare a concise and analytic report.

The format to be used depends on the type of institution. Based on the major differences and unique characteristics of different types of institutions, NAAC classifies institutions of higher institutions into three categories – universities, autonomous colleges, and affiliated or constituent colleges. To suit the needs of each one of these categories a separate manual has been developed. Recently, draft guidelines and manuals have been evolved for teacher education institutions, medical institutions, open universities and distance education units of conventional universities. These formats can be either downloaded from the NAAC web site (www.NAAC-india.com) or obtained as hard copies from NAAC. The format for the self-study report for universities is enclosed as *Appendix I*. It contains three sections: Profile of the university, Criterion-wise input and data sheets to be completed by every department (entitled Inputs from the departments).

As one can see, the format requires both quantitative and qualitative input from the institution. In fact there is criticism that NAAC asks for too much data. Institutions also comment that priorities of their documentation mechanisms are different and that they are not organized in such a way as to meet the requirements of the self-study report. While Part I seeks more quantitative data, Part II is expected to be evaluative and analytic. On receiving the self-study report from the institution, NAAC initiates action for peer assessment.

Who will perform the assessment?

Peer assessment is one of the critical elements, similar to self-study, which has evolved as an internationally accepted component of external quality assurance. Though the significance of peer review in quality assessment is still under debate, none of the quality assurance agencies has found a better alternative to the mechanism of peer review. Qualifications and talents of the people who constitute assessment teams are critical to the credibility of the whole process. Nonetheless, the professionalism with which the accreditation process is planned and implemented by the accreditation agency is of equal importance to the success of the peer team. Even the most highly qualified team can be thwarted in its work if the accreditation agency is not clear in its expectations of the team.

There are many variations among quality-assurance agencies in the role played by the peer team and the role of the agency in assessment decisions. NAAC defined these roles clearly and developed the support structure accordingly. NAAC's role in assessment *per se* is kept minimal; the NAAC personnel only co-ordinate the peer team visits to institutions. They remain in the background and do not take part directly in assessment *per se*. At the same time, to ensure the consistency and credibility of the assessment process, NAAC plays a leading role in the broader assessment scenario. It has a major responsibility in planning the evaluation framework, development and fine-tuning of instruments and methodology, eliminating conflicts of interest in the assessment process and enhancing the professionalism of peers. Thus, NAAC does not stop as a mere co-ordinating agency but strikes a balance between co-ordinating functions and steering assessment processes.

The strength of this approach is dependent on the professionalism of experts, especially of the chairperson, and on how well the expert

panel functions as a group. This has been ensured to a large extent by identifying competences needed for responsibilities, involving the right kind of experts in assessment teams who have these competences, and training experts to do the job more efficiently.

Assessing quality is a rigorous task. During the assessment visit, the peers interact with various constituents of the institution, hold discussions, ask for relevant documents and arrive at inferences. This whole procedure requires the ability to hold face-to-face interactions effectively, maintain interpersonal relationships, and to be objective and open-minded in taking decisions. Sometimes they may have to lead a sub-group, or may have to work independently and assist the chairperson of the team. This can be done in a professional manner only if the peers have the ability to work in as well as lead a small team. This also calls for the ability to work in tight time schedules and under strict deadlines, the ability to write clearly and effectively, and to be able to record evidence systematically. NAAC identifies people who have these abilities to be included in its pool or database of experts.

Care is also taken to select only those experts who are known for their integrity. It is not enough for the institution to have confidence in the expertise of the peers. More than anything the institution should be able to trust the peers.

Over the years, NAAC has relied heavily on nominations, databases of other national bodies and informal ways of identifying the peers. Seven years ago NAAC collected the CVs of thousands of experts and developed a database. Four years ago there was an effort to advertise in newspapers and experts were selected after a thorough scrutiny. We should remember that experts might not like to respond to an advertisement and 'apply', even if they would appreciate the assignment. However, the nominations have worked very well and

vice-chancellors of universities have nominated the right kind of people. Proven peers have also suggested names and the council staff identify potential peers during the assessment visits. As the assessment visits gain visibility, faculty members have started to look at the assessment responsibility as a rewarding experience. An invitation by NAAC to join the assessment visit is seen as 'recognition' and experts submit their CVs to NAAC. This has greatly facilitated the expansion of the database of experts who are central to the assessment exercise.

Apart from the database of peers/experts, NAAC has developed a training strategy in which selected experts undergo a three-day intensive programme and are inducted into the National Cadre of Assessors. The details are given in *Chapter VII*. There may be a subtle difference in the usage of the term 'peers' and 'assessors' when there is a reference to the training strategy. Other than that, very often they are used interchangeably. Assessors undergo training whereas peers may not be trained. At the same time all assessors are peers as well and since all peers do the assessment job they can also be called assessors. Therefore, in discussions that follow, the terms are used interchangeably.

Since NAAC focuses on the institution as a whole, it looks for peers who understand and appreciate the institutional context. The database of experts has a large number of experts who, although accomplished in a special field or discipline, can serve as 'generalists'. So far the involvement of representatives from the private sector has not been attempted and the need to do so has not been felt. However, there are discussions going on about involving 'other stakeholders'.

Suggestions to involve other stakeholders such as the government, funding agencies, students, employers and the public have emerged during academic interactions. If 'assessment overload' of the

institutions has to be avoided, it may be necessary to enter into collaborative assessment with professional bodies that might result in the involvement of experts other than academic peers. NAAC is aware of the need to also consider quality assurance agencies of other countries as stakeholders, for purposes of mutual recognition of the assessment outcome. These emerging trends are discussed under 'Future perspectives' in *Chapter XI*. The academic advisory committee, which is the statutory body to advise NAAC on these issues, will consider this when the need arises. At present, most of the discussions on peer team composition still concern perfecting the current practice of involving only academic peers.

Peer team visit

The selection of team members and their subsequent visit to the unit of accreditation are stages in a process that begins as soon as an institution submits its self-study report. The visit by the peer team gives the institution an opportunity to discuss and find ways of consolidating and improving the academic environment. The team by no means goes on a fault-finding mission nor does it interfere with the autonomy of the institution.

As the first step to constitute the peer team, NAAC identifies a panel, from the extensive database of experts, with national-level representation and consults the institution about any justifiable reservations it may have regarding any member of the panel. When the objections are reasonable, NAAC forms the visiting team from among other experts on the panel and obtains their acceptance to work on the team. NAAC has the freedom to choose other names and/or make changes. The composition and the size of the peer team depend on the nature of the unit of accreditation – the number of subunits, its geographic location, clientele, funding, socio-economic environment, etc.

Once the peers have been chosen, NAAC finds out whether they have any conflict of interest with the institution to be assessed. Though the peers are experts known for their integrity, they have to sign the *no conflict of interest statement* in order to ensure and assure objectivity. It makes sure that the peer does not belong to the same state where the institution is located and that he or she has no affiliation with an institution competing directly with the institution to be assessed. It also requires certification that the peer has no involvement with the proposed institution, directly or indirectly through any close relatives, in the past or at present, as either an employee or a member of any official body as a consultant or a graduate. A similar statement has to be signed by the institution. It has to certify that at least for a year none of the members of the proposed team would be appointed for any important assignment in the institution.

After receiving confirmation from the experts, the programme of visits to the institution is finalized. The team visits the institution on mutually convenient days for validation of the self-study report through interaction with various functionaries and scrutiny of documents.

Peer assessment

The validation of the self-study report by the on-site visit and the subsequent assessment by peers has the following two steps:

- criterion-wise assessment;
- application of weightages to calculate the overall institutional score.

Criterion-wise assessment

For each of the seven criteria, the peers look for evidence not only to validate claims in the self-study report but also to judge the standing of the institution and record the appropriate percentage scores. While arriving at the criterion-wise final assessment, the strengths of the institution in the following key aspects are evaluated.

Criterion I: Curricular aspects

- compatibility of the programmes with goals and objectives;
- initiation, review and redesign of programmes;
- feedback on programmes;
- interaction with academic peers and employers;
- programme options.

Criterion II: Teaching/learning and evaluation

- judging students' knowledge and bridge/remedial courses;
- teaching/learning process;
- use of new technology in teaching and co-curricular activities;
- examination process;
- innovative evaluation methods;
- recruitment of faculty and faculty development programmes;
- evaluation of teaching, research and work satisfaction of faculty;
- monitoring and rewarding successful teaching innovation.

Criterion III: Research, consultancy and extension

- promotion and sustenance of research culture and research output;
- freedom to publish in academic forums;
- benefits of consultancy;
- faculty participation;
- awareness programmes;
- resources to conduct extension activities;
- services provided in the area of expertise.

Criterion IV: Infrastructure and learning resources

- physical facilities;
- maintenance;
- optimal use of infrastructure;
- library and computer facilities;
- health services and sports and physical education;
- hostel and canteen.

Criterion V: Student support and progression

- progression to employment and further study;
- pass and drop-out rate;
- student feedback on various aspects;
- alumni association;
- financial aid to students;
- academic counselling;
- placement services.

Criterion VI: Organization and management

- organization structure;
- functions and powers of functionaries;
- manpower requirement;
- recruitment of staff;
- training and performance appraisal;
- participation of student, faculty and staff in decision-making;
- new technologies in communication;
- budgeting and auditing procedures;
- resource mobilization and effective utilization;
- financial management;
- welfare schemes;
- grievance redressal mechanism.

Criterion VII: Healthy practices

- complementary system such as self-financing courses, need-based courses;
- national/international linkages for teaching and research;
- industry linkage;
- educational innovations such as credit system, examination reforms and modular curriculum;
- working with specific mission and goals;
- chairs of excellence;
- teaching and research awards won by the faculty;
- others.

During the on-site visit, keeping in mind the philosophy of NAAC, the peer team does an objective assessment of the quality of education offered in the institution through three major activities – visiting departments and facilities, interacting with various constituencies of the institution and checking documentary evidence. The interaction with the faculty normally happens when the team goes to departments and facilities. Separate sessions are arranged for interaction with management, administrative staff, and representative groups of students, parents and past pupils. It has been found that interactions enhance the team's 'feel' of the institution. For each interaction NAAC has evolved a guiding agenda. The agenda for the interactions during the visit to a typical college are given as *Appendix 2*.

The interaction with the representative group of students has proved to be a very fruitful part of the visit. To manage the interaction effectively, it is generally restricted to around 50 students. However, the questionnaire evolved by NAAC on the campus life of students is distributed to a cross-section of students at random, managed directly by the NAAC officer, and this input is also made available to the peer team before it meets the representative group. The confidential

feedback from students often helps the team identify areas that need more attention.

The application of weightages

Validation and subsequent assessment lead to an overall institutional score and a detailed report, which begin with the team agreeing on criterion-wise scores. Taking cognizance of the variance in types of institutions, different criteria have been allotted differential weightages. The weightages marked below (*Table 3*) are used for calculating the institutional score.

Table 3. Calculating weightages

Criteria	University	Affiliated/ constituent colleges	Autonomous colleges
Curricular aspects	15	10	15
Teaching/learning and evaluation	25	40	30
Research, consultancy and extension	15	05	10
Infrastructure and learning resources	15	15	15
Student progression and support	10	10	10
Organization and management	10	10	10
Healthy practices	10	10	10

The weighted average of the scores is calculated applying the following formula:

$$\text{Institutional score} = \sum C_i W_i / \sum W_i \quad (i = 1, 2, \dots, 7)$$

where W_i = weightage of the i th criterion and

C_i = score of the i th criterion.

The institutional score is further used by NAAC to obtain the overall grade. Nevertheless, the role of the peers is only to give the institutional score to NAAC with the detailed report.

Format of the report

The report is in four sections. Section I is the *Preface* or introduction that gives the context of assessment—the background of the institution and the purpose of the visit. Section II presents the assessment under the seven criteria. Section III is the overall analysis and Section IV is the confidential score sheet.

Section II, i.e. the *Criterion-wise analysis* is the major component of the report built on the specific key aspects listed earlier under the seven criteria. It evaluates strengths and weaknesses of the institution with reference to key aspects, which has been found to be of great benefit to the institution for initiating quality-enhancement strategies. Section III, which is the *Overall analysis* of the report, highlights strengths as well as areas in which improvement needs to be made when the institution is considered in totality. Care is taken to avoid repetition but sign-hosting is well in place. Not every weakness given under the various criteria will necessarily be a major weakness and the peer team limits the overall analysis to major points linked to the seven criteria. The analysis presented in this part serves as the basis for the team's confidential recommendations to NAAC.

Section IV is entitled *Confidential recommendations to NAAC* and *is not disclosed to the institution*. It presents the assessment of the peer team in terms of criterion-wise scores in percentages and the overall institutional score.

This report is the basis on which NAAC takes a decision and hence NAAC emphasizes that it should be specific about commendations,

weaknesses and suggestions. Moreover, the report has to be shared with the institution at the end of the visit itself (except for the confidential part). This makes the writing of the report a serious mission to accomplish.

Sharing the report and its implications

In NAAC's methodology, sharing the report with the head of the institution has a very significant role that has influenced the whole methodology in many ways. Towards the end of the visit, the draft report is given to the head of the institution for checking factual accuracy as well as for feedback on the evaluation of the peer team. If the head does not agree with the evaluative remarks of the team and thinks that the remarks are based on incomplete or wrong data, it is discussed with the peer team. If the peer team is convinced of the observations of the head, the draft report may be modified accordingly. This gives an opportunity for the head to differ in opinion from the peer team and to present the point of view of the institution, even though he/she cannot insist on the way in which the evaluative remark should be modified. The head may go through the draft report with one of his colleagues, and in most cases invites the chair of the steering committee that might have co-ordinated the preparation of the self-study report, or the second in command, if the head happens to be the chair, as is often the case in many colleges. In practice this leads to responsive, open and diplomatic discussion between the peer team and the institution.

Sharing the draft report makes the job of the peer team very challenging. 'Looking for evidence' is always kept in focus from the start of the assessment exercise. In fact, the members of the peer team arrive at the institution for the on-site visit with the list of 'further evidence needed'. NAAC insists that there must be clear, uncontentious and sound evidence for every evaluative statement that is formulated. As the

members collect evidence during the on-site visit, they spend time individually as well as collectively on reflection and team discussion. During discussions on the drafting of the report the team keeps the following questions in mind:

- is the report evaluative?
- is the message clear?
- are the judgements supported by evidence?
- does the writing match the institutional score?

The team takes adequate care to collate data that form the basis for evaluative remarks, especially 'hard remarks' that are likely to be objected to by the head. Interestingly, what NAAC sees as its major strength is criticized by a few: what if the burden of sharing the report with the institution affects adversely the truthfulness of the evaluation itself?

It is true that the peer team expresses hard remarks in a positive tone. It avoids brutal words or a magisterial, condescending tone. For example, the team will not say 'the functioning of departments X and Y is not satisfactory' but would prefer suggesting that these departments need to be strengthened or cause some concern. This tendency to be gentle has led to criticism that there is 'ambiguity in the evaluative language'. Critics comment that softening remarks might not present the true evaluation, and with the good intention of not hurting weak departments, the team might often become so soft in its remarks that the outcome could be misleading. There have been rare instances where the institution, after having agreed with the report, later complained that the grade awarded did not correspond. Out of 261 institutions that have been accredited so far, not even 5 per cent has expressed this concern. In fact, balancing evaluative language and ensuring the correlation between the institutional score and the report is a challenging responsibility for

the peer team. NAAC insists that the report should be commensurate with the institutional score and that the team takes time to reflect on this before sharing the report.

Another criticism is that the major task of the team might become that of completing the on-site visit without any confrontation with the institution, rather than presenting a truthful evaluation. However, cases of disagreement are very rare and are almost always solved with a minimum of attention. They very rarely extend after the on-site visit. For example, there was a situation where the institution disagreed with the evaluative remark about the faculty publication but needed some time to produce the data. The chair suggested that NAAC could always take care of it after checking the evidence, but without substantive evidence it would not be possible for the peer team to modify its evaluative statement. When the evidence was produced by the institution after a few days, in consultation with the chair, the sentence was slightly modified before placing it before the sub-committee review. Even in the case of average performers or institutions that are less tolerant to criticism, the instances of disagreement have been handled quite well, which is mostly due to the team's meticulous databased evaluation and to the chair's diplomatic skills. Focusing the attention of the peers on key aspects through formats and pointers, and the emphasis given at every stage for collecting evidence and recording justification for inferences drawn, have greatly facilitated the team in institutional evaluations without disagreements with the concerned institutions.

Various safeguards evolved by NAAC – guidelines for report-writing, review of the report by the sub-committee of NAAC, review of the sub-committee recommendations by EC and editing by an expert who is well experienced in assessment – have contributed to the standardization of the reporting strategy. Statements based on mere impressions, commendations that may violate existing

governmental or institutional norms and remarks that are not in line with NAAC's stand are eliminated at this stage. Perhaps this is a rich area, where within such a short span of time NAAC has succeeded in stabilizing its procedure; this remains an uncharted area for many other agencies.

Thus, the peers have the following three responsibilities in the whole process.

- **Before the visit**, every member of the team analyzes the self-study report and makes a tentative evaluation. NAAC sends the self-study report to the peer team members well in advance. The peers go through both Part I and Part II of the self-study report thoroughly and based on the analysis of the data, arrive at a tentative evaluation of the performance of the institution.
- **During the visit**, the team looks for evidence to validate the self-study report and collects additional input to assess the standing of the institution. The visit varies from three to five days depending on the size and complexity of the unit to be assessed. The team visits all departments and facilities, interacts with management, faculty, students, staff, alumni and parents and verifies documents. As the team collects evidence, the *tentative individual scores* are revised and fine-tuned to *provisional team scores* in percentage.
- **At the end of the visit**, the team makes a collective assessment on the strengths and weaknesses of the institution, records the justifications for the inferences drawn, agrees on the criterion scores and finalizes the highlights of the assessment report. The team discusses the 'issues of concern' and shares the draft report with the head of the institution. In the exit meeting that follows, the chairperson of the team shares the highlights of the assessment (not the scores, which are confidential until they are processed

and approved by the Executive Committee of NAAC) and hands over the draft report officially to the head of the institution. This 'draft report' is only for internal use by the institution until it is finalized as a NAAC document. The report is passed on to NAAC to be placed before EC of NAAC, along with the confidential recommendations of the team. The decision of the EC is final.

In brief, the roles and responsibilities of the peers are as follows:

Before the visit (as individuals)

- understand NAAC's process;
- analyze the self-study report;
- identify the strengths and weaknesses;
- arrive at criterion-wise tentative scores with justification.

During the visit (as members of the team)

- share the analysis of the report with the team members;
- agree on issues that need further probing;
- accept responsibilities to collect evidence;
- interact with the management, head, teachers, staff and students;
- check documentary evidence;
- cross-check non-documentary evidence;
- validate the self-study report;
- agree on provisional criterion-wise scores.

At the end of the visit (as a team)

- write a clear report;
- arrive at the final scores;
- share the draft report with the head of the institution;
- share the highlights of the draft report in the exit meeting;
- submit a signed copy of the draft report to the head of the institution;

- submit the draft report and confidential scores to
- NAAC.

Institutions use the report in many different ways. Policy on public disclosure requires that the institution should not use partially or summarize the report to project a biased picture. If it only uses excerpts from the report, anyone who wishes to see the full report should be given a copy. It is requested that institutions restrict their usage of the report to internal purposes until the report is finalized as a NAAC document. Once the final reports are put on the NAAC web site, institutions may publish them in their handbook or annual report.

The final outcome

The major role of the peer team is to provide the institutional score and the detailed assessment report. The rest of the process is to be performed by NAAC as directed by the Executive Committee. In principle, if there are no adverse remarks or complaints from any quarters on the process, or no apparent conflict of interest on the part of anyone involved in the process, the EC in its normal course of action approves the recommendation of the peer team. It subsequently uses the institutional score to give the institutional grade.

If the overall score is not less than 55 per cent, the institution obtains the **Accredited** status. Accredited institutions are graded on a five-point scale with the following scale values:

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Institutional score (upper limit exclusive)</i>
A++	95-100
A+	90-95
A	85-90
B++	80-85
B+	75-80
B	70-75

C++	65-70
C+	60-65
C	55-60

Institutions, which do not attain the minimum 55% points for accreditation, would also be intimated and notified indicating that the institution is "assessed and found not qualified for accreditation". After EC's decision, the institution is informed of the overall grade along with the criterion-wise scores and the information is included on the web site. Once the editing is completed, the detailed report that highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the institution under various criteria is put on the NAAC web site.

To discharge these responsibilities, NAAC has a core group of academic and administrative staff. The organizational structure of NAAC has made provision for roughly 15 personnel at the officers' level and has doubled the number of support staff to assist the officers in their functions. NAAC had used the services of consultants in the beginning. Currently, three fourth of the positions in both categories have been filled and there are a few consultants who work on one-year contract. Based on the need for more staff at a particular level, the decision-making body of NAAC can always sanction additional positions.

The use of new communication technologies has simplified the co-ordination job of NAAC. Well-formulated promotional materials, the NAAC web site, manuals that can be downloaded from the web site and workshops that are organized in collaboration with other agencies have all helped NAAC manage a wide range of responsibilities with a small but competent core group. With more institutions volunteering for assessment, efforts have already been taken to strengthen the positions at the officers' level.

With this compact organizational structure - EC and GC to steer policy decisions, a core group to initiate and co-ordinate assessment and the large network of resource persons to carry out the challenging task of assessment - NAAC has been functioning smoothly. The instruments and methodology of NAAC have been discussed at various forums. Institutions that undergo assessment have access to all NAAC manuals and guidelines, even those prepared for peer teams. This has enabled NAAC to instil confidence among academia. There has not been any major criticism of the adequacy and reliability of the overall methodology. However, what the nature of the process ought to be (mandatory or voluntary), what the unit of assessment and assessment outcome should be and the objectivity of peer assessment are often issues of debate. The arguments behind these debates and the rationale for NAAC's stand are explained in the next chapter.

V. SETTING PRIORITIES

For any strategy to be successful it is necessary to identify the 'if and only if' conditions and the degrees of freedom the system can afford – aspects where deviation must be avoided and areas where changes can be introduced which may lead to improvement. In order for it to be accomplished, it is based on both the national context and on the purposes for which the accreditation mechanism had been initiated. Once these issues are agreed upon, there may be no turning back for quite some time. Field experience may lead to further fine-tuning, but the consistency in the strategy would have to be maintained. Lack of clarity on those major aspects would eventually lead to a situation where the assessment mechanism may be expected to achieve conflicting objectives. The rationale with which NAAC firmed up some of these decisions and contentious issues that are still debated are the highlights of this chapter.

NAAC was aware of two major issues that had to be clarified at the start, i.e. the 'unit of assessment' and 'reporting the assessment outcome'. It was agreed that NAAC would promote institutional accreditation with provision for departmental accreditation and that the reporting strategy would be an overall institutional grade supplemented with a detailed assessment report which would be made public. In fact, the reporting strategy must essentially depend on the unit of assessment, which is why these issues are not treated separately in the following pages.

The overall strategy – institutional accreditation resulting in both a report and a single overall institutional grade – was expected to promote self-improvement by the institutions themselves. This is well achieved by classifying or grading institutions on a multi-point scale

and giving them a detailed assessment report. When the grades are made known, institutions understand as to where they stand in the quality continuum as compared to others at the national level. The assessment report highlights their strengths and weaknesses, which enables institutions to plan further quality-enhancement strategies. Even those that acquire the higher rating may choose to maintain this level through co-ordinated and conscious efforts.

Till recently, NAAC followed a five-point scale of grading with the following scale value (in % and upper limit exclusive):

- A Five star - A***** - Institutional score of 75 and above
- A Four star - A**** - 70-75
- A Three star - A*** - 65-70
- A Two star - A** - 60-65
- A One star - A* - 55-60

Table 4. Overall spreading of grades

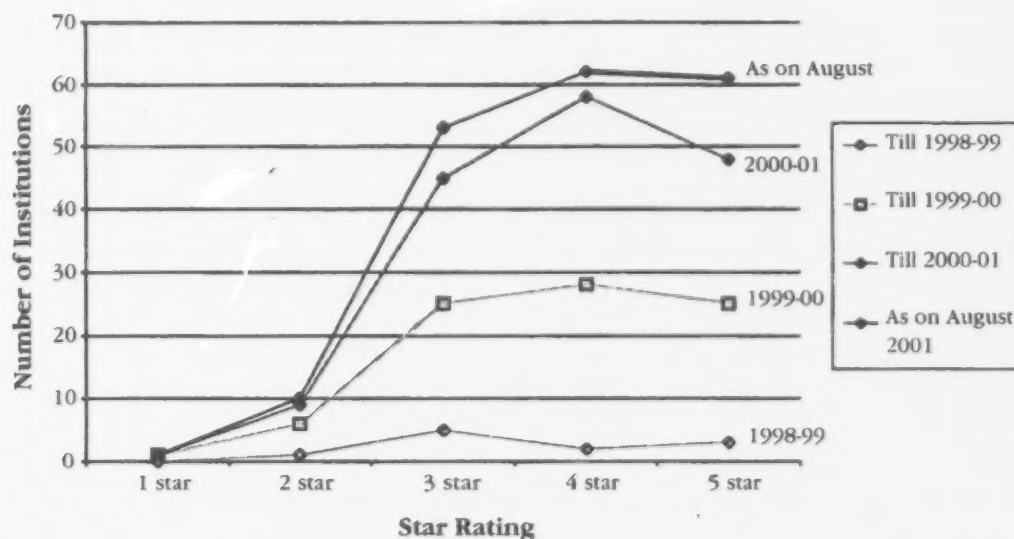


Table 4 shows the distribution of star gradings from the initiation of accreditation by NAAC up till August 2001. It shows that over time a greater number of better grades were granted.

To make the assessment more enabling, the assessment results of the institutions that got less than 55 were not made public.

It was also expected that this strategy would facilitate other beneficiaries in their decision-making. Public disclosure of the assessment report, through the NAAC web site, helps other beneficiaries use the assessment outcome for making a choice among institutions. However, there was severe criticism of this strategy and NAAC received many suggestions on how it could be done differently. Since only 11 institutions have been accredited so far under the new grading system, that too without changing any other aspect of the methodology, the non-comparability of grades and the debate related to the disclosure of criterion-wise scores are yet to have a major impact on the Indian experience of accreditation.

Questions of the following kind were raised by many in the initial stages and they continue to be contentious issues.

1. How can research-oriented and teaching-oriented universities be assessed with the same set of criteria as unitary-central and affiliating-state universities?
2. Why is NAAC promoting the star culture through its star ratings?
3. Why not cease the usage of the two-point scale of accredited/not-accredited status?
4. Why should NAAC follow a five-point grade, rather than ranking?
5. What is the rationale for the five-year validity period for the grade?
6. Why are institutions only informed of their grade and not their score?
7. Why does the scheme of grading have the range of five scores for each of the first four levels of star ratings and a wider range of 75 and above for the highest grade?

8. What happens to institutions of differing potentials grouped under the same category?
9. Within an institution, there are departments of varying performance. How is the single institutional grade justified?
10. Can we follow the UK model of not giving a summative grade?
11. Can we follow the American model of not using grades?

Most of these remarks were based on what the academia thought should be the *intended outcomes* of NAAC's process. However, their understanding, or assumption, is not in line with the actual purposes for which NAAC has been established and this was made clear through workshops and national-level discussions. The intended outcome is to facilitate institutions towards self-improvement and the prime beneficiary of the assessment outcome is the institution itself. The extended group of beneficiaries, namely, students and funding agencies, may also use the report appropriately but may only do so with the clear understanding that their use of the report is only a second-order phenomenon; hence they should supplement their use by checking with other sources of reference. Adopting an appropriate reporting strategy and convincing the academia about its appropriateness are critical to the success of any assessment mechanism and the rationale given by NAAC in support of its reporting strategy is worth reflecting on.

Research-oriented v. teaching-oriented universities

In India, institutions of higher education have been established to perform three functions: teaching, research and extension. In fact, government support is primarily for teaching programmes, and in the case of affiliating universities it is also for providing academic leadership in curricular aspects to the affiliates through affiliating functions. When institutional performance is assessed, performance in teaching/learning is the prime criterion. Among the seven criteria

for assessment, the criterion 'Teaching-learning and evaluation' carries the maximum weightage in calculating the institutional score. The criterion 'research, consultancy and extension' comes next.

While all institutions are expected to strike a good balance between teaching, research and extension, as they evolve they develop their own strong and weak areas and become known for their strengths. It is to be encouraged if a few institutions become better known for their research contributions. But taking pride in research and trying to be research-oriented, at the expense of teaching, needs to be checked at the very beginning. Claiming to be research-oriented should not be on the wrong assumption that research is prestigious while teaching is not so.

The data of beneficiaries of higher education at various levels indicate that doctoral-level students do not constitute so much as 1 per cent of total student enrolment in higher education. In the year 1998, in general higher education alone, enrolment in doctoral levels was 0.70 per cent. We should note that this is the case of general higher education and enrolment in research is much less in professional areas. NAAC has taken the stand that accreditation need not lose its focus on 'quality of education' to serve the interest of the research groups. There are other sources of information that would serve the purpose of highly specialized groups.

State v. central universities

There is an assumption among the academia that central universities are a class by themselves; hence the suggestion that NAAC should have a separate category for these institutions. In reality, state and central universities have only minor differences but major similarities. The generic functions of all universities in India are similar. The major difference between state and central universities is the source of funding and to some extent central universities may

be better provided for. Some state universities are also better provided for and on a different footing, e.g. the University of Roorkee, which has been modelled after the Indian Institutes of Technology. There are well-known state universities that have become centres of excellence, e.g. the University of Pune and the University of Madras. Moreover, whatever variance is to be found among state universities – rural/urban, old/young, unitary/affiliating, general/specialized, well-established/struggling for survival – is also found among the central universities. Variance among state universities may be more pronounced due to their number (around 200). There are young central universities such as Tezpur University or Assam University, which are just trying to establish their reputation, and others with hardly two or three research scholars in each department and just a few projects to support faculty research. Although few in number (only 18), the central universities themselves have all of the variances possible. A separate classification for them can be justified only if further categories are created based on their differential orientations in teaching, research, affiliating functions, age, locale, etc. This classification may result in only one or two – in most cases, just one – central university in each category. Too many classifications and too many non-comparable outcomes are of no use to any stakeholder. It may not be meaningful to have further classifications for minor differences.

Star culture

The grading system of NAAC that uses 'stars' is under severe criticism on the ground that it promotes a 'hotel' culture. NAAC tries to explain that there is no sanctity about the use of the word 'star' and that it can always be replaced by the word 'level' or by a numerical indicator like 1 to 5. In fact, the Philippines model uses the classification of level 1, level 2, etc., and the UK model uses the 1 to 4 numerical grades. When these models were discussed at a national

consultation, the academia expressed concern regarding the ambiguity attached to the grading patterns of the UK and the Philippines. In India, would it make the message clear to the public? Would there be a doubt about which was a better grade – 1 or 5? This was an important issue of concern since NAAC wanted to make sure that the outcome would not result in confusing signals. After weighing both advantages and disadvantages of the different grading patterns, the favoured opinion was the use of a system that is well known to everyone and hence the system of using stars was adopted.

NAAC continues to put forth its argument but with limited success. There are issues that can be sorted out by a meaningful rationale, but the star issue seems to be one where no such reasoning can convince the academia. The point that the word 'star' can be replaced with other options does not seem to reach many. There is even a dangerous tendency to blame the star system for any minor 'roadblock' in the progress of NAAC; this has caused a lot of concern to the decision-making bodies of NAAC. There is a difference of opinion among the EC members themselves. Some strongly feel that there should not be any major change in the grading pattern until NAAC completes the first cycle of assessment, and others feel that to avoid further confusion, the star grading should be dropped at the earliest opportunity. The collective decision so far is to continue with the star grading and one has to wait and see how NAAC is going to solve this issue.

To respond to the star debate, that was initiated mostly by the institutions that were yet to get accredited and the academia that were not convinced of the grading system, NAAC decided to modify its grading pattern once again. The Committee on NAAC's Policy and Procedures, constituted by UGC in December 2001 to give recommendations on further changes that might be needed in the NAAC's policies and procedures, also recommended that the usage

of star might be replaced. These developments were discussed further by the Executive Committee of NAAC and with effect from 15th March 2002, NAAC follows the nine-point scale which uses a combination of letter grades and pluses. With this new grading, the issues of re-orienting the stakeholders to the new system of grading, training the assessors appropriately and facing the questions of non-comparable outcomes are now emerging as challenges. As mentioned earlier, so far only 11 institutions have been accredited under the new pattern and there is a consensus that whatever is the outcome of this revision, further changes would be done only when NAAC launches the next cycle of assessment.

The two-point scale

One of the options suggested by the academia is to indicate by way of a two-point scale nothing more than whether an institution is, or is not, accredited. The suitability of this model depends on the role of governmental control in higher education, on the size of the system and the variance in quality of education among institutions.

The two-point scale may be appropriate for systems where there is little governmental control in the establishment of higher education institutions. The way in which accreditation evolved in the USA is a typical example. In countries where institutions are established by legislation or acts, there are substantial built-in checks and balances through traditional regulatory mechanisms. In the Indian context, affiliation, recognition, review and inspection are some of the traditional regulatory mechanisms that monitor the essential requirements, and ensure that the minimal functioning takes place. In this context, the two-point classification which is no more than the affiliating function by the universities, but perhaps with a higher threshold level, is not enough. The comprehensive assessment

that goes beyond overseeing the minimal performance may not be meaningful with a two-point scale outcome.

The rating scale also depends on the size of the education system and the variance in quality among the institutions of higher education. A larger system with more variance in quality needs more classifications. The two-point scale is inadequate for the 12,600-odd institutions of higher education in India that know much variance in the quality of the educational experience they offer to students. The NAAC thus introduced a two-tier system that classifies institutions at the first level into two categories: accredited/not-accredited. At the second level, only accredited institutions are classified on a multi-point scale.

Ranking the institutions

The two-point scale mentioned above and the ranking suggested by a few others are logically opposite suggestions. Ranking institutions calls for a different set of conditions to be fulfilled. This model may be suitable to systems that are homogeneous and small in size with mandatory assessment to be done within a stipulated period of time.

Ranking implies placing every institution in a particular position of merit. To begin with, it should be possible to cover all of the institutions before the order of merit is finalized, and it should be done within a stipulated period of time. As long as it is a voluntary process, all of the institutions cannot be covered within a certain time-frame. Even if it is made mandatory to bring all of the institutions to the fold of assessment, ranking institutions of a large system is neither feasible nor meaningful. Ranking colleges from 1 to 12,600 and universities from 1 to 274 is impossible.

Furthermore, institutions are to be evaluated without losing sight of their distinctive characteristics and their own sets of goals and

objectives. Any attempt to compile ranking tables according to some generic criteria is contrary to the principle of institutional improvement, and will be detrimental to the whole quality assurance system. These attempts would be futile in a large and complex system with a lot of diversity.

Direct ranking, even if it is assumed that it is done within a fixed time-frame, will put institutions into a very fine classification and make improvement difficult for the institutions at the lower rung. What is required is a middle ground, putting a large number of institutions into a few groupings, which would allow differentiation but preserve a wide range of institutional types with scope for improvement. In addition, it is difficult to evolve the instrument and methods that can dependably distinguish between institutions of close standing. Taking cognizance of all these contextual conditions, NAAC has adopted a grading system where the merit of the institution is given its due place; an institution is placed under one of five clusters based on its merit, without losing sight of its distinct characteristics.

Accreditation for varying periods

The majority of the academia agrees with NAAC that a simple accredited/not-accredited status is not sufficiently effective for large systems. Instead of grading, they suggest that the accredited status may be tied to a certain number of years indicating the level of performance of the institution. In this line of thinking, *accredited for two years* may imply the need for improvement, whereas *accredited for five years* may imply a good standing in quality. The supporters of this outcome argue that indicating the number of years achieves the same outcome as grading, but carries with it a lesser stigma. We should note, however, that it is the mindset that dictates whether the outcome of assessment is a stigma or not. Even under the accreditation status of varying periods, the frame of reference will automatically

be reoriented to equate the different periods of accreditation to different grades. For example if *accredited for three years* is perceived to be a mid-level grade, *accredited for five years* will be equated to a higher-level grade. An institution with a longer period of accreditation will attract more funds, good teachers, the creamy layer of student population and social repute, as do institutions with a higher star rating. In a nutshell, opting for accreditation status of varying periods does not really do away with the adverse effects, if any, of the current system of multi-point grading.

Another reason for not adopting variable periods of accreditation is the need for a thorough review of the entire system on some fixed schedule. The international practice varies from 3 to 10 years. Following a fixed period of validity of the assessment outcome, many countries have already completed one or more cycles of assessment and are in the process of reviewing their methodology for the next cycle. Furthermore, the capacity of weak institutions to meet frequent assessment visits and the purpose they could serve are doubtful.

Scores on a hundred-point scale

Another suggestion is to give the exact score on a hundred-point scale. In any process involving human factors, there is always room for some deviation from accuracy and hence the critical element of the quality assurance – the combination of self-study with peer assessment – needs to be applied with caution. Similar to the fact that institutions vary in their ability to introspect and project themselves, peers who validate the self-assessment also differ in their ability to rate institutions. The EQA systems have evolved suitable protocols and procedural safeguards to minimize the subjectivity at both these levels. In spite of all these efforts to ensure objectivity in assessment, the instruments are not accurate enough to fully eliminate

subjectivity. Until the development of an instrument that can assure that institutions of very close standing may be distinguished accurately, giving scores may not be appropriate.

In NAAC's process, pointers of quality and benchmark statements have been evolved to reduce subjectivity. However, in the first cycle of assessment for a complex system, it is necessary to anticipate minimal deviation in the exactness of a score and the 'range of various grades' takes care of this deviation.

Clubbing institutions of different levels

Lumping institutions under the same category, irrespective of subtle variations in performance, cannot help but raise comparisons. It should be remembered, however, that this has always been the procedure when assessing the performance of students. For student evaluation, moving away from scores to grades is considered to be a healthy trend and it is recommended by examination reforms.

According to the grading system of NAAC, grade 'four star' is given to any institution that obtains the institutional score in the range of 70 to 74.99 per cent. Institution X, with an institutional score of 70, and institution Y with 74.9 come under the same category. When we try to classify 12,600 institutions under five or six categories, such clubbing becomes unavoidable. Even under the nine-point scale these shortcomings are unavoidable. To show the subtle difference, we must not attempt a hundred-point scale, the inadequacies of which have already been explained. These issues were taken up at a national-level consultation. After weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the current grading system, experts have agreed that its advantages outweigh the advantages of any other system. Consequently, the favoured opinion is to place institutions under several broad categories.

Variance within an institution

Every institution has performing as well as non-performing departments and at the superficial level, it may appear that the overall single institutional grade does not reflect the difference among departments. While performers may feel that they deserve a better grade as compared to the institutional grade, poor performers may play safe in the image of the overall grade.

To overcome this concern, some institutions expect a specific evaluation of every subunit. In a comprehensive assessment, an in-depth evaluation of every department may not be possible. This process would need both a different instrument and methodology and people to be involved for such an outcome should also be different. However, the achievements of the departments are given due mention in appropriate sections of the report and specific ones needing further improvement also find a mention. In spite of that, if performers feel that they deserve better, they can always apply for departmental accreditation.

Overall grade

For the same concerns as expressed above, it is suggested that departmental assessment and departmental grades should replace institutional accreditation and an overall grade. India has 259 universities and about 11,000 colleges; choosing, therefore, any unit smaller than the *institution* would obviously have many practical difficulties. If one chooses the *department of study* or discipline as unit, with 11,000-odd institutions, the number of units to be assessed would run into many thousands, representing a stupendous and practically impossible job to be done within a normal assessment cycle of four to five years. In a country like the UK, where there is a relatively smaller number of large institutions, the choice was made some years ago to use the

programme as the unit of assessment and two cycles have been completed thus far. In a country such as India where there is a large number of smaller institutions, the institution appears to be the obvious choice of unit.

Apart from the practical aspects, the overall grade has many advantages. The academic quality is justifiably defined as the collective impact by the institution as a whole for providing desired knowledge, skills and competences. If it is true, then the assessment strategy for quality should focus on the *collective impact* and the institutional grade will be the obvious choice for reporting the assessment outcome. Moreover, the public consciousness of academic quality is built around the institution rather than on any specific course or degree, even though faculty and quality programmes contribute to the image of the institution. After all, it is departments that form the backdrop for institutional assessment and without them assessment is impossible.

Another advantage of grading the institution is its direct usefulness and relevance to the major stakeholders, such as the government that provides funds, the prospective students who choose the institution for studies and the employers who hire the graduates. The institution is the unit of funding for governments or private foundations and trusts all over the world. There are certain specific programmes of studies and research projects that are funded by different individual sponsors in a faculty or a department of studies. This funding is both lasting and sustainable - i.e. maintenance or block grants - and only comes to the institution, however, from the state and not directly to any of the subunits. Even agencies that provide support to individuals insist on institutional commitment for accountability and in many cases the institution is the proper channel

through which the transaction takes place. Even public philanthropy seems to favour the institution as a whole.

Looking for the *critical size* of the unit is also an important factor to be considered. Many state universities in India have a large number of small colleges affiliated to them which take care of undergraduate education, while the universities are responsible for postgraduate and research programmes. The few unitary universities may be exceptions. The result of the bifurcation is that neither colleges nor affiliating universities normally have more than 1,000 to 1,500 students. In such cases, for the extent of efforts and the time involved in the assessment work, the outcome may not be commensurate with the efforts. It is a futile task to take up a unit that is much smaller than the institution as a whole.

Grading department/academic programmes

Grading department/academic programmes may have the advantage of being well focused. It can provide the right kind of input to discriminating beneficiaries such as employer and students. However, the disadvantages of choosing this strategy are the following:

- At the national level, the number of such units/programmes will be too large and consequently one would end up with a large number of such units to assess.
- A department/programme at a given institution must not normally involve more than a few faculties and students and consequently the unit size will be too small for such a big effort.
- Compared to the institution as a whole, both the composition and character of the department/group proposing a programme may undergo frequent changes. If one faculty or more leave the

department, the quality of what is offered will suffer and the outcome of the assessment might not be tenable for an extended period of time.

- Programmes of interest to students and employers may not be the same in a few years. It is likely that some programmes may not even exist after one or two academic cycles, thus making the assessment effort futile.
- Even though programme curricula are implemented by the department/school, responsibility for most infrastructure facilities such as library, computer centres and other learning resources may be shared with others and their quality is thus determined by the central governance structure rather than by departments of studies.
- A variety of interdisciplinary programmes offered by more than one department with varying responsibilities may not pose a problem when everything is in order. If there happens to be a problem at any juncture, however, identifying the cause and taking appropriate value judgements become difficult and will pose a serious problem in objective assessment.

In the process of informing academia that institutional and departmental/programmatic assessments would serve different purposes, and that it was not to be expected that institutional accreditation serve the interests of programmatic accreditation, NAAC realized that there was a need to strengthen departmental/programme accreditation. Efforts were initiated in response to this demand.

NAAC gradually succeeded in convincing academia of the rationale for its present strategy. NAAC's present strategy for reporting assessment is the collective aftermath of eight years of national-level

consultations, further fine-tuned with eight years of practical experience. The recent mid-term review has revealed that the instrument and methodology of NAAC's process are both meaningful and reliable. During academic interactions NAAC emphasizes that instead of *reinventing the wheel*, academia should assist NAAC in optimizing the accepted strategy. The debate continues but the majority agrees with NAAC.

VI. PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

Response from the system of higher education to external quality assurance mechanisms has been mixed the world over. Every system faces a unique set of problems and evolves suitable strategies to overcome these problems, to suit its own contextual conditions. In India, problems faced by NAAC and strategies it adopted to overcome them can be seen in three phases. Through well-planned strategies, NAAC has progressed from the stage marked by 'mistrust, rejection, hesitation and apprehension' to the stage of 'appreciation' by the majority of academia. This chapter focuses on various problems and challenges NAAC faced as it progressed through these three phases of development.

The analysis of institutional response reveals that Phase I was the initial stage of NAAC where the focus was on strategies to convince the system, as well as on achieving acceptability from the majority. Phase II was the crucial period of implementing and fine-tuning the accepted methodology. Phase III is the current period, where some stakeholders have given a clear indication that the outcome of assessment will have a major role in their decision-making. This has put pressure on institutions of higher education to undergo assessment, bringing a large number of them to approach NAAC. Each of these phases has presented unique problems.

Phase I. First three years – striving for acceptability

In the first three-year phase, institutions were either indifferent or reluctant to volunteer for assessment. Apart from general lethargy and the fear of being assessed by others, there was also lingering doubt in the minds of some about the relevance of the entire concept

and its applicability to the Indian context. Some of their reservations on external assessment are listed below:

- is NAAC's process necessary, when universities already have their own monitoring mechanisms for their affiliated institutions and for themselves?
- will assessment and accreditation be meaningful in the affiliating mode of the Indian system of education?
- will it not suffice if existing structures that monitor higher education – e.g. the UGC and university mechanisms – are made to function more effectively, instead of establishing another agency such as NAAC, which would result in a duplication of functions?
- will not NAAC's assessment demoralize institutions that receive a lower rating?
- what will happen to students and teachers of institutions that do not perform well in NAAC's assessment?
- is it worth trying an American model on the Indian system of education?
- who will provide for the accreditation cost?

Such questions are likely to arise in any system that has several regulatory mechanisms already in place, however ineffective present regulations may be. It is not an exaggeration to say that NAAC was very successful in putting across its ideas to provide meaningful answers to the above questions, which eventually increased support of academia for accreditation.

Checks that already exist

One category of apprehensions related to the various monitoring mechanisms that were already in practice in the system. Hence the question: *Do we need another agency like NAAC?* Many did not realize that the existing regulatory mechanisms had the tendency to boil

down to a routine inspection of minimal requirements and to not focus adequately on 'quality enhancement'. Furthermore, the difference in frame of reference for accreditation by NAAC was not very clear to many. It took nearly two years of an intensive awareness campaign to spread this message among institutions of higher education.

Implications of lower rating

There was concern about what might happen to students and teachers of institutions that may be rated low in NAAC's process – the fear was expressed that lower rating would also result in lower funding. The majority of the institutions accepted NAAC's methodology as a reliable and objective approach when compared to the fragmented and subjective social accreditation. There were a few vociferous groups, however, that voiced the criticism that NAAC's process could possibly promote a divide between *highly-rated* and *not-so-highly-rated* institutions. To alleviate these doubts, NAAC argued that its primary aim would be to help institutions improve themselves, and that its assessment outcome would replace existing subjective social assessments by a more objective and transparent assessment. Institutions were also assured that funding would not be linked proportionately to NAAC's rating. For example, the state government may decide that highly-rated institutions should be given support for sustenance of quality, whereas those at the middle rung should be supported for development of facilities that would improve the quality of their offerings. The state government may also decide that institutions with a lower rating should be kept under special watch. However, apprehension because of what this surveillance would imply continues to be an intimidating factor for institutions of average quality.

Resource requirements

Accreditation requires a lot of resources – both human and financial. Investment in terms of human resources, especially in preparation of the self-study report, is central to the accreditation process. Faculty and staff spearhead the preparation of the report, with no supplementary remuneration. Depending on the workload, NAAC suggests that at least the co-ordinator of the steering committee should be relieved of some of his/her routine work to concentrate on the self-study report. Consequently, the human resources needed for the preparation of the report has not been a major issue. In fact, many institutions realized how intensive the exercise could be only after initiating the self-study process.

Nearly all of the institutions have the basic requisite facilities for preparing good in-house documents and fulfilling NAAC's requirements of data. There have been instances, nonetheless, where an institution has entrusted this document to professional external assistance - to obtain a final document with four-colour printing, graphs and photographs – which is expensive and not really essential. If internal facilities and resources are used optimally, the expenditure should not exceed Rs.10,000 (US\$200) for colleges, and possibly slightly more for universities. Resources required, therefore, for the preparation of the self-study report was not a problem in the initial stages.

The major concern of the institutions was the accreditation cost in terms of the accreditation fee and on-site visit expenses of the peer team (travel and accommodation). For a college with programmes in both the arts and science disciplines, the cost would be in the range of US\$2,000-4,000. For a university, the assessment fee would increase accordingly with the number of departments. Furthermore, larger institutions entail a larger visiting team, and thus increase travel and boarding expenses. The total accreditation expenditure for a medium-

sized university would amount to US\$5,000. Since the assessment outcome is valid for a period of five years, the institution should make provision for this expenditure on this basis.

Roping in support from UGC and state governments to cover these accreditation costs abolished this concern. At its meeting held on 29 July 1997, UGC stated the following regarding universities: "... payment of assessment and accreditation costs to NAAC, up to a maximum of Rs.5.00 lakhs (Rs.0.5 million) in the case of large universities, may be accepted as an admissible item for plan grant of the respective universities by the Commission. The grant for this purpose may be released to the concerned university".

It was expected that the total accreditation cost would not exceed this maximum, even for a very large university. However, that was apparently not the case since the fee structure of NAAC was based on the number of departments. Where the accreditation fee seemed to be too high, NAAC was always helpful by cutting down the accreditation fee. Smaller and related departments were clubbed together for the purpose of calculating the fee alone. Departments that could submit their recent assessment reports through other professional bodies (medicine, engineering, etc.) were not taken into account for calculating the fee, despite the fact that those departments would have been visited. The outcome was confusing and a case-by-case approach was used in dealing with universities.

It was later decided that UGC would give accreditation fees for universities directly to NAAC. Consequently, the share of universities is limited to travel and local accommodation expenses of the peer team. When guest-house facilities of universities are satisfactory, teams may make use of them, which would mean little additional expenditure for the university. The EC agreed that if the sole transfer of money for assessment would be from UGC directly to NAAC, then

the confusing fee structure might as well be simplified. Accordingly NAAC revised the fee structure into four slabs. Depending on the number of departments, the university may fall under one of four slabs that vary from Rs.200,000 to Rs.500,000 (US\$4,000 to 10,000 approximately) and this amount would be made available to NAAC by UGC towards assessment fees and the peer team's travel expenses.

Autonomous colleges are allowed to meet accreditation expenses with the autonomy grant, which is a special grant of several thousand US dollars, given only to autonomous colleges. Other non-autonomous but affiliated colleges are allowed to meet the accreditation expenses from the development grant given to them by UGC. In a few states, governments have extended full financial support for accreditation cost of government-run colleges. The pattern of expenditure has been such that colleges need not spend more than what is made available by UGC for the purpose. For a college, the total accreditation cost may be US\$2,000-3,000.

This is an area in which NAAC had to work hard for a few years to find funding for the accreditation cost of universities and colleges. It made a few changes in its fee structure to make it more realistic. There was also confusion about the interpretation of the term accreditation cost and what expenses could be covered under that head. In retrospect, it is evident that the financial implications should have been spelt out more clearly at the outset.

Suitability of the model

Ultimately, once all criticisms had been answered, some took refuge in questioning the suitability of this *American model*. The fact that NAAC has taken the experience of many other countries to evolve a system that would be most appropriate for the Indian context was made clear to the institutions. NAAC also emphasized that whatever

may be the national context, certain critical elements such as self-study and peer review would continue to be present in all quality assurance mechanisms. The question about the suitability of the borrowed model is no longer a contentious issue.

Even at present, after successfully convincing institutions on the merits of accreditation, NAAC does encounter the above-mentioned questions from a small percentage of the academia – the 'yet-to-be-convinced' academia. Through national-level consultations and academic interactions, NAAC could clear the apprehension in the minds of most of the academia.

Support structure and resources for assessment

During this phase, NAAC as an organization strengthened its resources and support structure. The first set of academic staff was recruited and additional support staff was found. The database of experts was expanded. Efforts to develop the campus were initiated. There were some difficulties in finding a suitable site, but these were quickly sorted out, and NAAC identified the site for its campus.

Resources have never been a problem for NAAC. There was adequate financial support from UGC. When NAAC was established, a starter grant of Rs.100 million (US\$2 million approximately) was supplied to meet recurring and capital expenses. Since then, a grant-in-aid is fixed annually through the Finance Committee of NAAC, comprising the chairman of the Executive Committee, the Secretary of MHRD, the finance adviser to UGC and a senior academic staff member and finance officer and director of NAAC. The grant is fixed based on the budget proposal from NAAC under two major categories: revenue expenditure and capital expenditure. Capital expenditure is classified under two heads: Part A, which is the general capital expenditure for hardware, furniture, vehicles, etc. and Part B, which covers development schemes including campus development. The

grant to meet developmental activities (Part B) is commonly referred to as development grant and is generally of a non-recurring nature.

The overall budget, as proposed and approved for the year 2001-2002, provides for revenue expenses of Rs.32 million (for salaries, travel, office administration, printing and publication, maintenance of equipment, etc.). For capital expenses (i.e. data processing and networking, library purchases, furniture and fixtures, air-conditioning, electrical works, telephone systems, reprographics and fax, audiovisual equipment and the Internet, purchase of vehicles, research, campus development, etc.) the budgetary provision is Rs.56 million – the provision for Part A capital expenses is Rs.6 million and Rs.50 million for Part B.

There was no shortage of human resources since NAAC's process of accreditation banks on peers spread throughout the country, and the up-to-date database of experts served the needs. Manuals and guidelines for accreditation were finalized, involving a large number of these experts.

Manuals and promotional materials were widely distributed. Workshops were conducted to provide feedback on the manuals and guidelines. The confidence NAAC could instil among institutions and its efforts to solicit support from other stakeholders led to the next phase of operationalizing the process.

Phase II. The following two-year period – operationalizing the strategy

Changes in the governance of NAAC occurred during Phase II. When the first Director of NAAC left, it took some time (April 1998-2001) to identify the next director and until then the chairperson of NAAC officiated as director. The MoA of NAAC was revised and registered during this period and this revision resulted in a few

changes. The chairperson of UGC became president of the GC of NAAC and he presides over the meetings. The chairperson of NAAC continued to be chairperson of the EC and other decision-making bodies of NAAC such as the Finance Committee and the Academic Advisory Committee. These changes did not affect the momentum NAAC was gaining in the academic community - 118 institutions of higher education, 10 universities and 108 colleges had been assessed during this period. A few more issues surfaced during this field experience, mostly concerning fine-tuning the process and its outcome.

The self-study report

Orienting institutions towards a proper preparation of the self-study report was a major task. In the initial stages, most of the self-study reports turned out to be descriptive in nature. Even the self-analysis was similar to a summary of descriptive data given in Part I. Through workshops on self-study reports, institutions were oriented on the expectations of the analytical element of the report. Lacking a good model to show to institutions, the first few workshops on the self-study report were found to be very difficult and NAAC developed several hypothetical reports to be used during these discussions.

The peer team visit

The length of the peer team's on-site visit varies from two to five days and was perceived to be very short, even for the purposes of validating the peer team's impressions. NAAC hence developed worksheets to facilitate the pre-visit preparations. On an average, each peer spends 20 to 40 hours on pre-visit preparation, analyzing and making notes on the report submitted by institutions. However, some institutions still feel that the peers would have noted their strengths if the on-site visit had been of a longer duration.

Institutions conveyed the opinion that the yardstick for grading should take note of institutional diversity and unique environment. This expectation still poses a problem when institutions insist that the constraints of their environment should be accepted as a justification for their non-performance. NAAC's assessment has already been sensitized to institutional diversity through differential weightage of criteria for assessment. There is also a little leeway for peer assessment within a broad but consistent frame of quality assessment. However, institutions apprehending their grade insisted that there should be a differential yardstick.

The outcome

Institutional response to the assessment result was mixed. While they were mostly satisfied, some complained that the evidence and rationale provided in the assessment report were insufficient to support the conclusions and recommendations. Correlation between the report and grade was questioned in a few cases, and in others complaints were formulated because neither the content nor the vocabulary of the reports varied substantially, whether an institution was given the topmost rating or the next. 'Assessment runs the risk of settling into stereotyping' was the concern expressed by one of the experts who reviewed the reports. The treatment of the subunits in the report also became an issue raised by a few institutions. They held forth that every department should be given a specific evaluation and that good departments required a special mention. Some institutions felt that their unique features were not noted well in the report. Such complaints were minimal, however, and the feedback was taken as important input to further adjust the reporting methodology.

Classifying institutions into five categories raised a few unhappy notes, especially from top-bracket institutions. Institutions were

aware that with thousands having to be graded under a five-point scale, clubbing of institutions was unavoidable and the grade could not reflect subtle variations. However, some of them have suggested that there should be another level of assessment wherein top-bracket institutions may be invited to participate in a higher level of quality assessment to bring out the differences among institutions of the same group. The recent change in the grading system to the nine-point scale has helped to overcome this criticism to some extent. As mentioned earlier only 11 institutions have been assessed under this grading system and we cannot say whether this positive impact could be sustained.

Expectations of institutions concerning incentives and disincentives through the outcome of accreditation became more explicit during this phase. These expectations went as far as giving assistance in syllabus revision to obtaining deemed-to-be university status. Some of the expectations were not at all under NAAC's purview.

Nature of the process: voluntary v. mandatory

While Professor Sukumaran Nair's document emphasized the voluntariat of the accreditation process, the Committee on Accreditation and Assessment Council recommended it be made almost mandatory. As of now assessment and accreditation is voluntary; an institution must transmit a letter of intent to NAAC, through which it volunteers to undergo this process. However, governments or other funding agencies may link their funding with accreditation. For instance, UGC has already made accreditation by NAAC mandatory to receive development grants. The state government of Tamil Nadu has made it mandatory for colleges of this state to be accredited by NAAC at the three-star level and above, in order for them to become eligible to apply for the autonomous status, which is also the case for continuance of autonomy and to apply for the

deemed-to-be university status. Stakeholders linking the assessment outcome to their decisions has already exerted pressure on institutions to undergo assessment.

Major divide in acceptance

There seemed to be a major divide between institutions that received a grade in tune with their expectations and those that received grades lower than what was anticipated. The latter recorded many critical comments of various aspects of the process, including criteria, format for the self-study report, composition of the peer team and reporting of the outcome. They felt that the lower grade was due to the lack of standardization of the methodology.

Institutions having experienced autonomy (special status colleges with freedom to design curriculum and conduct examinations) and institutions within the affiliating structure, did not appreciate the process to the same extent. This dissimilarity could be seen already at the stage of volunteering for the process. While more or less 25 per cent of the autonomous colleges (40 out of 133, a significant number) have undergone assessment, only roughly 1.3 per cent of the affiliated colleges (160 out of 12,600) have been assessed. Many affiliates had the stereotypic thinking that the parent university was responsible for every malady, whereas the self-study report submitted to NAAC revealed the fact that within the affiliating structure institutions attempt many innovative strategies on their own initiative. While some institutions accepted the newer responsibilities they had rediscovered, a few others, especially those with a lower rating, still blamed the affiliating structure. They felt that the lower rating was mainly due to factors related to the rigidity of the affiliating structure over which they had no control. Some complained that the assessment process was not sensitive to constraints due to the system of affiliation.

The next major divide in the response of institutions could be seen between the first batch of institutions that underwent the process under the earlier grading scheme and those which followed. Initially, NAAC's methodology spelt out clearly that the final outcome would be a single overall institutional grade. After having evaluated various alternatives, i.e. the UK model of indicating the rating under six aspects, the US model of linking accreditation with varying periods or differential qualifiers such as 'accreditation/accreditation with conditions: probation, warning', etc., the collective decision was for NAAC to give an overall institutional grade. The purpose of this was to understand the overall health or quality of an institution. The grading A,B,C,D,E was initially adopted. The rationale behind the overall letter grade has already been explained in Chapter V. However, by the time the outcome had been processed for the first group of institutions that had been assessed under 10 parameters, many had recorded serious reservations, for instance, on the use of the grade 'B'. The EC of NAAC also had reservations about the way in which the overall grade had been attained in some cases. It had even been suggested that this first process of assessment should be considered as a pilot study. Consequently, these institutions did not receive an overall institutional grade; only the parameter-wise scores in percentage were given.

These circumstances led to non-comparability of results when institutions that had been later assessed received their institutional grade, according to the revised grading strategy where A,B,C,D,E was replaced by A* to A****, and many institutions among the first group were displeased. The Academic Council of NAAC considered this issue and recommended that the first group be given the overall grade. Though this recommendation was duly approved by the EC, there was nearly a two-year lapse of time between these stages, and this period of waiting led to a few unhappy remarks. The number of such

institutions being very small, it did not affect the acceptance NAAC was gaining gradually. It remains nonetheless an issue of concern for both NAAC and for those institutions that did not obtain a good rating. Now that most of these institutions are either nearing the end of the period of validity, or are in the process of submitting themselves for another assessment, these concerns will be sorted out soon, only to be replaced by concerns of a higher order regarding the next cycle of assessment.

The next major divide was between institutions that had been accredited and those that were yet to undergo assessment. While accredited institutions were appreciative of the objectivity in assessment, many institutions still had a major hesitation on this issue. Academia within such institutions had no difficulty in accepting the indispensability of peer assessment in research funding, selection of personnel and other examination-oriented procedures, but firmly questioned assessment by peers in accreditation and its objectivity.

Having observed genuine concerns raised by academia, NAAC developed procedural safeguards that have already had a positive impact on fine-tuning quality assessment, details of which are given in the next chapter. The efforts of NAAC to have consultations on academic decisions and the continuous improvement of the instrument and procedures increased its acceptability in Phase II and attracted stakeholders, who gave clear signals that their decisions would be based on the outcome of assessment. This ushered in the next phase.

Phase III. Impact of stakeholders

Although NAAC's prime objective was to enable institutions for self-improvement, NAAC also ensured that stakeholders gained confidence in the outcome of assessment and that it served as much

as possible their information needs. Consequently, there were many positive developments. State governments, state councils for higher education, directorates of collegiate education, fund-giving agencies, other accrediting bodies, educational partners abroad and both students and parents based their decisions on the accreditation status of institutions. These developments have resulted in a surge of requests from institutions for assessment by NAAC.

As this trend augments, NAAC will have to face more challenging issues, such as maximizing assessment visits and at the same time minimizing inter-team variance. Discussions proceed as to the capacity growth of NAAC by expanding the pool of peers and the National Cadre of Assessors. Establishing regional centres may also be considered. Recommendations are still inconclusive. As of now, since NAAC depends largely on a vast network of resource persons spread throughout the country, managing assessment visits has not posed a serious problem.

As of May 2002, NAAC has assessed 263 institutions, out of which 261 have been given the accredited status. The reason for this high rate of positive outcome is obvious. Accreditation being voluntary, only institutions that are confident about their potential have been volunteering for assessment. The spread of ratings as given in the graph (*Appendix 3*) for the 250 institutions that were assessed under the earlier grading pattern substantiates this point. The 11 institutions that have been assessed with the new grading system have not been included in the graph due to non-comparability of the outcomes.

The list of accredited institutions and their grades is given as *Appendix 4*. In NAAC's scheme of assessment, followed till 15 March 2002, the name of the institution that does not obtain accredited status is not revealed to the public and the institution is asked to come forward for additional assessment after a term of two years. In the

revised grading pattern, although the policy on public disclosure indicates that the institution that does not get the accredited status would be informed of it, NAAC is yet to come across such a case due to reasons already mentioned. Those having received accredited status may also use this provision to improve their grade. Several institutions among the first batch of 10 that were not happy about the grade awarded to them have reinitiated the process and are again preparing the self-study report. Reassessment is yet to be done, however, for any of these institutions, which announces another challenge related to the following cycle of assessment – focus of assessment or reassessment and the institutional preparation for it.

To sum up, there were problems and challenges at different levels, the most notable ones being the following: lack of motivation among institutions, resistance from faculty to external assessment, questions on needed resources, apprehensions about the objectivity of the process, lack of clarity on the implications of assessment outcome and lack of awareness on the part of stakeholders. However, the efforts of NAAC to involve various stakeholders at different levels helped tackle these issues and there has been a shift in the institutional response from 'rejection, indifference and hesitation' to 'acceptance, adoption and implementation of quality-enhancement strategies'. The next chapter discusses these strategies in detail.

VII. TOWARDS SOLUTIONS

We know only too well that any change introduced in conventional practices is both difficult and unsettling for teaching faculty and educational administrators. Educational administrators and teaching faculty, by and large, belong to a conservative group and are inclined to change slowly. Among the faculty there is hesitation to accept any change that upsets the status quo. Among the administrators, there is a fear of too violent a change and that the change may not result at all in the expected outcome. In addition to the problem of 'rejection attempts', the accreditation process has its own procedural difficulties and unknown snags which may surface unexpectedly. Through well-planned strategies, NAAC found appropriate solutions for most of these problems – the focus of this chapter.

Several innovative schemes that met faculty resistance in their initial stages include the semester system of instruction, various examination reforms, restructuring of curriculum, the concept of autonomous colleges to progressively replace the affiliating system, etc. Moreover, accreditation by NAAC can now be included in this series. In order to confront rejection responses successfully and to clear apprehensions discussed earlier, NAAC applied appropriate strategies that targeted various stakeholders. Care was taken to ensure that these strategies had the following elements:

- broad involvement and consensus building to ensure widespread support in evolving norms and criteria;
- careful development of methods and instruments for assessment;
- development of the national cadre of assessors to enhance the professionalism of assessment;

- rigorous implementation of procedures;
- transparency in all of its policies and practices.

Incorporating these elements, NAAC applied multi-pronged strategies at various levels: awareness programmes to familiarize the academia and educational administrators with the concept of assessment, debates on critical issues, workshops on development and research, training experts for assessment, discussions with administrators to rope in government support, etc.

Reaching out

Hundreds of seminars and academic interactions were organized with various groups of academia at the national level, familiarizing them with the concept of assessment and accreditation. A wide range of promotional materials was prepared and distributed to thousands of teachers of higher education. The materials included several booklets that would answer most of the queries and apprehensions of the academia. The *NAAC News* – the quarterly newsletter of NAAC – also added to the efforts to reach out to a larger number of institutions. Furthermore, most of the awareness activities were conducted involving various universities, colleges, state councils of higher education, state governments, directorates of collegiate education and other forums such as the All India Association of Christian Higher Education and the Association of the College Principals.

Development of instruments

Through a series of consultative interactions with a large body of academia, NAAC evolved the norms, methods and instruments for assessment. It was decided, as one of the norms, that NAAC would concentrate on institutions as the unit of assessment, with a provision for assessing individual departments as well, and for accreditation to

continue to be a voluntary process, the outcome of which would be valid for a period of five years. Detailed manuals and guidelines to facilitate institutional preparation were published to cater to different segments of the Indian higher education system. NAAC is presently developing a manual for departmental accreditation for which a series of national-level workshops has been initiated. A National Consultative Committee for Sciences has been formed and its first meeting was held in June 2001. In a short time, similar meetings will be organized for humanities and social sciences, after which modalities of departmental accreditation will be finalized. As of now the recommendations are inconclusive.

Revising criteria

To make its process ameliorative, NAAC introduced, in the initial years, a few changes in its criteria for assessment. The following 10 parameters at first formed the basis of assessment: goals and objectives, curriculum design and review, teaching/learning and evaluation, research and publications, consultancy and extension activities, organization and management, infrastructure facilities, support services, student feedback and counselling and generation and management of financial resources. Under each of these parameters, criterion statements had been identified. The first 10 institutions were assessed using these criterion statements/benchmarks as referral points. Field experience then indicated that reorganization was necessary and in the revised methodology, the 10 parameters have been reorganized into seven criteria, without losing any of the aspects of functioning. In addition, for each of the criteria, key aspects of functioning have been identified, which clarified the focus of the criteria, for institutions as well as for peers. Today the criteria and key aspects have been accepted as sufficiently holistic and comprehensive to project the functioning of an institution in the right perspective.

Responding to the genuine concerns of the academia

The Gnanam Committee Report (1990) suggested letter grades A to F on a six-point scale to evaluate the performance of institutions of higher education. The report suggested that grade F should lead to disaffiliation or closure of the institution, while D and E should signify being on probation. Grades A, B and C could be considered as acceptable. Dr Sukumaran Nair's document (1990), with specific reference to the accreditation procedure, had recommended grading institutions with letter grades A, B or C for accreditation and D and E for non-accredited status. Dr Vasant Gowarikar's report recommended a two-point scale. The various options were taken up for discussion by NAAC after its establishment in 1994. The grading pattern with letter grades from A to E was accepted at a national-level meeting of experts in 1996. The cut-off point for accredited status and the range for each grade were also finalized at the same meeting. This scheme was followed for the first 10 institutions that underwent the assessment for accreditation. The institutions that underwent assessment under this grading scheme had many reservations. They were not at ease, for instance, with the grades B and C. In qualifying terms, if A stands for an excellent institution, B may denote a good institution, and C may stand for an average institution, but the stigma attached to grade B, which is the symbol of second grade, means B will never denote a good standard. To eliminate this bias, the grading system was modified, with the letter A to denote the accredited status and the number of stars attached to A to denote the level of quality. Institutions that are not accredited are not given a letter grade. Thus the new scheme of grading is a two-tier system, and at level one the outcome is accredited/not accredited. At level two, only accredited institutions are classified on a five-point scale with A-five stars (A*****) being the top category and A-one star (A*) being the lowest. In the further revisions, the five-point scale was replaced by nine-point scale

to respond to the concerns about the star culture and the clubbing of institutions at the higher level.

The revised reporting strategy – institutional grade on a five-point scale with a detailed report – has been found to promote self-improvement by institutions. When the grades are made known, institutions understand as to where they stand in the quality continuum as compared to others. The assessment report highlights their strengths and weaknesses, which enables institutions to plan further quality-enhancement strategies. Even those having obtained the higher level of rating may plan on sustaining it through co-ordinated and conscious efforts. Another interesting element is the public disclosure of the assessment report. Including assessment reports on the NAAC web site has helped others to benefit from the use of the assessment outcome.

Fine-tuning

Of all the efforts made by NAAC, the one that had the most significant impact is the fine-tuning of the instrument, taking field experience as the key to move towards perfecting the instrument and methodology. Although NAAC's process had evolved through cognizance of both international experience and the Indian context, at the practical level many new issues came up, which formed the basis for further fine-tuning and the manuals and guidelines were revised accordingly.

Guiding peer assessment through benchmarks

An issue that continues to be in focus in all academic interactions on quality assessment is the issue of 'benchmarks'. *What benchmarks and indicators has NAAC evolved for placing the institutions under various categories?* As mentioned earlier, the outcome of assessment

by NAAC places an accredited institution in one of nine categories – C to A++ – with C being the lowest and A++ the highest category, depending on the quality of education. If it had been a two-point scale – i.e. accredited/not-accredited – the question on benchmarking might not have gained so much importance. Multi-point grading sensitized academia to the rationale behind the classification and NAAC has put in concerted efforts to evolve appropriate benchmarks.

NAAC decided that the appropriate strategy to evolve benchmarks with reference to its objective would be finding and implementing best practices that would lead to significant improvement in the quality of education, which is nothing other than best practices benchmarking. When the benchmarks effort was initiated, NAAC was following the pattern of 10 parameters. Best practices that contribute to efficient and effective functioning of the institution towards quality offerings were identified and defined and they were called criterion statements. Under ideal conditions, the best practices that can be expected in an ideal institution were identified as criterion statements. These criterion statements served as best practices benchmarks. The criterion statements/benchmarks thus evolved are given as *Appendix 3*. The first 10 institutions were assessed using these criterion statements/benchmarks as referral points. In the revised methodology, the 10 parameters have been reorganized into 7 criteria and key aspects. To benchmark the key aspects, NAAC evolved pointers of quality.

Pointers of quality

The development of pointers of quality was based on the logic that the existing situation is reasonably good and representative institutions may be taken as indicators of mid-level achievement – any institution that exceeds that level deserves to be credited. For every key aspect of the first six criteria, if we take the existing situation in most of the good

institutions as the base standard, a standard higher than the base would give a higher level of classification, and a standard lower than the base would give another category. Data were collected from a representative sample of around 40 good institutions and averages were calculated for the quantitative aspects. For some of these it was possible to fix a three-level classification, and for others a two-point scale was determined. The pointers of quality for criterion I of an affiliated college are given below (*Table 5*).

Table 5. Pointers of quality – Criterion I

Criterion I: Curricular aspects	Credit points
1. What is the range of programme options available to students for awards such as degrees, certificates/ diploma?	For every 3 programmes, 1 point, not exceeding 5 points
2. To what extent are the programme options career-oriented?	If >10 per cent of the programme options, 1 point
3. Do students have the flexibility to pursue a programme with reference to: (a) Time-frame matching student convenience and horizontal mobility? (b) Elective options / Non-core options?	Peer assessment – if satisfactory, 1 point for each aspect, not exceeding 2 points
4. How are the mission and goals of the college, if any (other than the general transmission and generation of knowledge) reflected through the curricula?	Peer assessment – if good, 2 points; satisfactory, 1 point
5. Is there any mechanism to obtain feedback from academic peers and employers on the teaching programmes and how is the feedback used in the initiation, review and redesigning of teaching programmes?	Peer assessment – if good, 2 points; satisfactory, 1 point
6. How long does it take for the college to introduce a new programme within the present university system?	If <2 years, 1 point

7. Has the college introduced any new courses in spite of delays in university processes, if any?	Peer assessment – if satisfactory, 1 point
8. Give details of college/industry/neighbourhood networking, if any.	Peer assessment – if satisfactory, 1 point
9. Furnish details on the inter/multidisciplinary aspects of curriculum design.	Peer assessment – if satisfactory, 1 point

After a thorough discussion with a group of experts, the pointers of quality (*Appendix 3*) were piloted on a few institutions. It became clear that for initial focus on aspects of importance, credits were useful as the referral point. It should be noted that pointers were not developed for the seventh criterion, namely Healthy Practises, since the purpose of that criterion is to take into cognizance the unique and innovative practises of an instituion which need to be contextualized. What is healthy practice for one institution may not be so for another institution and developing indicators for such a criterion will promote unhealthy copy-cat syndrome and become harmful to instituional diversity.

Frame of reference for peer assessment

Field experience indicated that credits could not be simply added up to arrive at the credit score. In the light of the standing of the institution with respect to these pointers, the peers had to give an overall 'criterion score' and as such they were not meant to be converted into criterion-wise scores. When the team, however, must judge the institution on a criterion, the outcome on individual indicators should be synthesized and peer assessment becomes vital. For example, the student/library-book ratio may be very favourable in an institution. The library may have long working hours, an open access system and a book bank facility. If the team judges library facilities by these aspects alone, the institution should be placed in the top bracket. But a closer scrutiny may reveal that although, over the years, the institution has accumulated books, there is much room

for improvement in the following aspects: quality and currency of the books, implementation of the book-bank facility, support services of the library, linkage with other libraries, and the maintenance. As one can see, for some of these aspects quantification in terms of a ratio is possible, and for others, there has to be a qualitative judgement in terms of good, satisfactory or poor. The peers must synthesize both qualitative and quantitative inferences to arrive at a holistic value judgement, in the context of the institution. In other words, they have an important role in moderating credits, synthesizing the outcome on individual indicators to evaluate criteria and in their contextualization. Hence a format was evolved to synthesize peer assessment. The frame of reference for peer assessment for criterion I is given below in *Table 6*.

Table 6. Frame of reference for criterion I

The frame of reference	Evaluation (score in %) Upper limit exclusive									Justification
	55-60	60-65	65-70	70-75	75-80	80-85	85-90	90-95	>=95	
Criterion I: Curricular Aspects This aspect requires value judgement on the practices of the institution in initiating and redesigning courses that are relevant to the regional and national needs. It also focuses on how the curriculum design of the institution offers diversity and flexibility to learners. This can be best done by judging where the institution stands with reference to the following aspects: • compatibility of programmes with goals and objectives • initiation, review and redesign of programmes • feedback on programmes and interaction with academic peers and employers • programme options • the system which enables the above										

The recent mid-term review conducted by NAAC revealed that the use of this format (*Appendix 5*) has greatly improved the objectivity of peer assessment.

Enhancing the professionalism of assessment

Having accepted peer assessment as an integral part of its methodology, NAAC brings in consistency and objectivity among the peers by appropriate safeguards, training strategies and discussions. A notable effort towards this direction is the development of the 'National Cadre of Assessors'.

The assessor's main responsibility is to visit institutions in view of assessing the quality of education offered there. As mentioned earlier, during the visit assessors must interact with the various constituents of the institution, hold discussions, consult relevant documents and arrive at inferences. This whole procedure requires the ability to hold face-to-face interactions effectively, maintain interpersonal relationships and possess objectivity and open-mindedness when taking decisions. Sometimes peers may have to lead a sub-group, or may have to work independently and assist the chairperson of the team. This may be done in a professional manner only if the assessor has the ability to work in or lead a small team. This also calls for the ability to respect tight time schedules, to work within strict deadlines, to write clearly and effectively and to record evidence systematically.

NAAC chooses assessors for this challenging but academically stimulating responsibility according to the following profile:

1. doctorate in any discipline from a recognized institution;
2. good record of achievement in the area of specialization;
3. experience of co-ordinating with senior officials and academics;
4. experience of working in tight time schedules;
5. ability to lead and work in small teams;

6. ability to communicate effectively;
7. ability to write clear reports;
8. wide range of experience in higher education;
9. aged 40 to 55.

Experts from different parts of the country are selected through nomination and advertisements after a rigorous selection process. NAAC then organizes a three-day residential training programme for selected assessors to induct them into the 'National Cadre of Assessors'. The training programme has been designed with ample scope for case studies and simulations to eliminate the personal bias of the peers. During the training programme the assessors come to realize that they must act on behalf of NAAC when visiting institutions, which also favours objectivity in the assessment. The training material and the *Handbook for Assessors* spell out clearly the roles and responsibilities of the members of the peer team, make explicit in concrete terms the purpose of every session, and provide hints to the assessors to facilitate their interactions with the various constituents of the institution.

This training strategy has given a professional dimension to the National Cadre of Assessors. The trained assessors are not full-time employees of NAAC but join assessment teams on invitation by NAAC. They would be on the active roll for a period of five years and participate in four to six visits of three to five days each per year, for which there is a nominal honorarium. The state-wise spread of trained assessors is as presented below (*Table 7*).

Table 7. Distribution of trained assessors

Andhra Pradesh	13
Assam	4
Bihar	1
Delhi	4
Goa	6
Gujarat	7
Haryana	3
Himachal Pradesh	3
Jammu and Kashmir	2
Karnataka	17
Kerala	12
Madhya Pradesh	2
Maharashtra	44
Meghalaya	3
Orissa	6
Pondicherry	1
Punjab	8
Tamil Nadu	25
Uttar Pradesh	7
West Bengal	13
Total	181

At the end of the training programme, the resource team evaluates every participant for the various competences required of an assessor. In general around 90 per cent of the trained assessors are attributed a 'good' to 'excellent' rating, and roughly 5 per cent may have to be dropped due to serious shortcomings. Though there may not be a formal intimation to such assessors, they are not invited on team visits. The remaining 5 per cent are those who may be strong in some areas yet whose weaknesses must be balanced appropriately by other team

members. For instance, an expert in Indian languages who is well recognized for his contributions as well as analytical skills may not be competent for writing reports in English, yet he would probably be an asset for input to the team when assessing an institution strong in 'Indian languages'. Consequently, the team composition should be balanced with others who have report-writing skills. Such evaluation of assessors is recorded in a structured format and made available to NAAC officers. If one peruses feedback given by the resource team of the training programmes, one can read such comments as: 'good for the Hindi-speaking belt', 'can lead a team to college after one or two visits', 'may not be acceptable to assess universities', 'domineering; should be balanced with a strong and diplomatic chair', 'will be an excellent team leader', 'does not respect time management', etc. When the newly trained assessor is inducted into a team for the first visit, these remarks become the guidelines for NAAC officers.

Furthermore, the first assessment visit of an assessor is more like a mentoring programme - care is taken to assure that other team members are well experienced. This makes the first assessment a smooth learning experience for the new assessor. More importantly, it ensures that the consistency in the team's frame of reference is not affected by inducting new members (although they are already trained for the job). The chair and the co-ordinating NAAC officer record the feedback from the performance of the assessor at the end of the team visit, if it happens to be different from that of the resource team or something in addition to that.

In the initial stages, building on to what is encountered after every assessment visit and experience is vital to avoid the repetition of mistakes. Until a pattern was set for criteria to be followed for team composition, NAAC was particular about regular staff meetings and briefings by co-ordinating officers. Amidst all the work pressures, staff members were very careful in sharing their experiences with

colleagues in staff meetings. During those meetings any issue of concern that might arise with reference to a particular assessor was made known to other officers. Though very rare, there have been instances where conscious decisions have been taken not to invite a particular member, based on the derogatory role he/she had played in the peer assessment. Continuous updating of such feedback on assessors and its dissemination among staff members who are involved in the team visits are vital to uphold the credibility of the process.

NAAC also has an on-line database, accessible to NAAC officers, which contains information and any remarks on peer teams that had been sent to different institutions, at various stages. It facilitates sharing of information among the council staff.

Fine-tuning the training strategy

After the completion of two training programmes, NAAC invited an international observer to sit in on one of the assessment visits with a view to appraising the effectiveness of the training strategy. The feedback was useful in fine-tuning the training strategy. Areas that need to be strengthened were identified as follows:

- adherence to the timetable for the visit;
- balancing the intensity of the visit programme;
- provision of more time for reflection and writing for the team members;
- use of the framework of key aspects to provide an agenda for meetings;
- increase of the number of parallel visits to subunits and the provision of more opportunities for the sharing of experiences;
- management of meetings, skills for asking questions and report-writing;
- reflecting on the relationship of the final criterion scores to the number and seriousness of the issues in the report.

The feedback had substantial influence on the planning of the peer team visit as well as on the training strategy.

Round-table discussion for peers

In addition to the training programme for assessors, round-table discussions have been held for experts and chairpersons of the peer teams who may not fit into the profile of assessors (they may be too senior to participate in training sessions or educational administrators, such as vice-chancellors of universities). This has greatly reduced the inter-team variance that may arise due to differences in the frame of reference.

Composition of the peer team

The inter-team variance is greatly minimized by appropriate composition of the peer team and maintaining links between different teams. Though institutional comparison is not the purpose of assessment, it becomes an unavoidable consequence to grading institutions. Peers or assessors, who have seen and experienced similar institutions for accreditation, are inducted into the team to maintain the link between teams.

Transparency of the process

Since the whole process is transparent, the institution is consulted on the panel of experts who are considered for constituting the final team. If the institution has any justifiable reservation against any member, it is brought to the notice of NAAC. Where reservations are justifiable, NAAC constitutes the peer team from among other members of the team. In addition, the certification of 'no conflict of interest' by both institutions and peers guarantees the objectivity of the process.

Facilitation by NAAC

The *Peer Team Document* prepared by NAAC was designed to bring in consistency in the way in which peers would make an assessment. Starting from tentative evaluation to final grading, it helps the peers when they record the reasons for the assessment, issues to be probed further and evidence required. The pre-visit preparation obliges the peers to record the tentative assessment of the institution, justifying the tentative score. This issue brings focus on peer assessment and also prepares the peers to look for information gaps. The pre-visit analysis slowly frees the peers from any preconceived notion and prepares the way to open-minded analysis.

Working in partnership

The on-site visit is planned in consultation with the institution. The institution and NAAC work as partners and plan the visit in such a way that the following aspects favour a truthful projection and validation of the institutional functioning:

- sequencing the visit schedule with ample scope for visiting facilities, interaction with the various constituents of the institution and review of documentary evidence;
- clear agenda for every session;
- peer team discussions placed at various stages of the visit;
- sharing of issues of concern among team members;
- looking for evidence, especially for any 'hard remark' about the institution;
- frame of reference given in the peer team document to record the assessment on the strengths and weaknesses of the institution;
- focused report writing;
- checking correlation between scores and the report;
- finalizing the report at the venue itself;

- emphasis on transparency in the process;
- sharing the report with the head of the institution.

Involving state councils of higher education

Workshops were organized jointly with the West Bengal State Council for Higher Education (WBSCHE), the Uttar Pradesh State Council for Higher Education, the Tamil Nadu State Council for Higher Education (TANSCHÉ) and the Andhra Pradesh State Council for Higher Education.

Support for accreditation cost

NAAC's efforts to solicit the help of UGC to support universities on the financial implications have been successful. UGC has extended financial support to the tune of Rs.0.5 million (approximately US\$ 10,000) to meet expenses involved in assessment and accreditation – accreditation fee and peer team visit expenditure. This would cover almost the entire cost of accreditation. For autonomous colleges, the accreditation cost is a permissible expenditure under the 'autonomy grant' by UGC. For affiliated colleges, UGC had taken the decision that "the colleges be advised to seek accreditation from NAAC and that the required fees of NAAC be met from the development grants already paid and to be paid in future to the colleges under plan".

Efforts are in progress to draw state support for self-financing colleges and others that do not obtain UGC grants. The government of Goa has taken a decision to hold admissible the amount spent by colleges towards assessment fees paid to NAAC. This motivated many colleges to apply to NAAC for assessment. The government of Tamil Nadu decided to submit government colleges for assessment in a phased manner. In Phase I, 11 government colleges identified by the Directorate of Collegiate Education were assessed, and in Phase II, another 11 colleges underwent the process. The Secretary of Higher

Education, government of Bihar, took the lead in bringing together the institutions of higher education of Bihar for a two-day workshop on assessment and accreditation with the support of the Minister of Education. The government of Bihar now intends to link accreditation status to both student fees and government grants for infrastructure. Meanwhile, as an incentive, NAAC itself extended its help by waiving the cost of the peer team visit for those colleges that came forward for assessment before March 1999.

Efforts are going on to bring in state support for self-financing colleges and others that do not get UGC grants. The government of Goa has taken a decision to hold admissible the amount spent by colleges towards assessment fees paid to NAAC. This motivated many colleges to apply to NAAC for assessment. In the meanwhile, as an incentive, NAAC itself extended its help by waiving the cost of the peer team visit for those colleges that came forward for assessment before March 1999.

Partnership with the States

NAAC has succeeded in strengthening its partnership with the states. The government of Tamil Nadu decided to submit the government colleges for assessment in a phased manner. In Phase-I, 11 government colleges identified by the Directorate of Collegiate Education were assessed, and in Phase-II, another 11 colleges underwent the process. The Directorate of Collegiate Education (DCE) of the Tamil Nadu government decided that it would extend financial support for infrastructure facilities of the select government colleges based on the recommendations of the assessment report. Such linking of the accreditation status is not necessarily for funding purposes alone. The Tamil Nadu State Government through the State Council for Higher Education resolved to recommend only those colleges that are accredited and rated high, for deemed university

status. The DCE of the Tamil Nadu government has made the accredited status with mid level grade and above as a pre-requisite for colleges that wish to apply for the autonomous status. Karnataka has made accreditation mandatory for all professional colleges. Similar moves are on in states like Bihar, Kerala, Goa, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

NAAC has promoted its partnership with the states by developing action plans for them to meet the UGC deadline of 2003 to get the colleges accredited. In Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra efforts of NAAC have already resulted in drafting a comprehensive action plan for the states. State level Coordination Committees have been constituted in these states for overseeing the process of accreditation. Similar discussions are on in other states also. The action plan includes an analysis of the assessment reports to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the institutions in the state and suggesting ways to remedy the weaknesses. It is heartening to note that the increasing involvement of the state governments is becoming more pronounced. However, a more organised relationship between accreditation, policy decisions of the governments and the decisions of the other funding agencies, mainly for quality enhancement schemes is yet to emerge.

Interactions with other agencies

NAAC had active interactions with the other quality assurance councils and brought together the major national professional bodies of India to discuss and evolve a method for collaborative assessment. Being the only 'national external quality assurance' body that has an instrument and methodology for comprehensive institutional assessment, NAAC promoted the concept of collaborative assessment to combine its resources and experiences with the specialized knowledge of professional bodies. NAAC took the lead in co-operating

in a sense of partnership with professional bodies and at the request of the Ministry of Human Resources Development (Department of Education), NAAC organized a meeting of various heads of professional councils to deliberate on the need and necessity to do the following:

- (a) establish a functional relationship between professional and accrediting bodies in respect of assessment and accreditation of subjects;
- (b) work on modalities for long-term co-operation and arrive at a memorandum of understanding to streamline the efforts of various agencies in a unified direction;
- (c) establish inter-agency linkages to avoid duplication and promote a culture of quality assessment and enhancement.

NAAC and MHRD convened to hold the first meeting on 18 November 1996. Participants in the meeting endorsed the following:

- accepting NAAC's three-stage process for assessment and accreditation;
- NAAC may undertake preparation of self-study manuals for professional subjects in collaboration with the respective agencies;
- assessment and accreditation of professional institutions should be a joint endeavour of NAAC and the concerned agency.

It was also agreed that each institution of higher education must be free to decide for itself whether or not to seek accreditation by any particular agency. Based on the discussions, NAAC proceeded in the preparation of the draft of the MoU document, with the following focal points:

- NAAC and the professional bodies will, in mutual consultation, select members of the peer team and the chairperson;

- mutually agreed-upon standards shall apply for judging the quality in functioning of the institution and for giving grades to the institution;
- NAAC will be the administrative agency for the process of assessment and accreditation and shall charge fees as approved by its council in consultation with the other agency;
- the final accreditation certification to be awarded will be jointly endorsed by both agencies;
- NAAC and the concerned professional body will work out the practical details of co-operation between the agencies and, in general, are to ensure proper and effective implementation.

The second meeting of the heads of professional bodies was held on 29 September 1997 in UGC, where participants agreed that NAAC should go ahead with interactions and dialogue with authorities of various professional bodies. It was also agreed that NAAC could sign MoUs with such professional bodies that are willing to proceed in a collaborative way. The Distance Education Council and the Bar Council had agreed on the principle to work with NAAC. Further dialogue is in progress with other professional bodies.

The instrument to assess and accredit the quality of education offered by open universities and distance education units has already been prepared in collaboration with the Distance Education Council of the Indira Gandhi National Open University. The National Consultative Committee on Accreditation of Distance Education has been constituted to recommend specific guidelines to be followed in the process.

International linkages

International linkages have been established with other countries for sharing of information and experience. Teleconferences,

binational conferences, joint research and publication programmes, academic exchange programmes, participation in international events and study visits to other quality assurance agencies are several initiatives that have been taken to broaden the horizons of NAAC's perspectives. The training strategy was evolved in collaboration with the Higher Education Funding Council of England and experts from the Quality Assurance Agency of the UK. International observers have joined the assessment visits to give their feedback about the process. Membership in the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education and the organization of the sixth biennial conference of the network in 2001 at Bangalore have further strengthened international linkages.

One of the international observers gave feedback under "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats" (*Appendix 6*) after joining an assessment visit. In this report, the major strengths of NAAC as an organization are noted to be effective and efficient administration, cost-effective functioning and independent decision-making. Regarding the process, the report indicated that it was in line with accepted international practices and that the criteria for institutional assessment were comprehensive. Furthermore, it commended the composition of the peer team, the guidelines provided for the assessment team, the thorough preparation of the peer team, the pre-arranged interactions with students, parents and alumni, and the depth of the assessment process. Special mention was made of the way in which the assessment team spent time reflecting independently and collectively on the interpretation of its observations and findings.

The feedback also voiced concern about the quality assurance of professional programmes being assessed by professional bodies as compared to institutional accreditation by NAAC and the consequent non-comparable outcome. The observer strongly suggested that

NAAC should extend its functions to programme- or departmental-level assessment and that the present practice is inadequate to identify shortcomings in programme quality. The report also expressed the concern that the fact that the process is both non-compulsory and voluntary may impede the assessment of institutions that need it the most. Also emphasized was the necessity to compel institutions into preparing a more in-depth assessment of their own shortcomings, and into making evaluative judgements of strengths and weaknesses in their self-analysis. The report also indicates apprehension about the sheer magnitude of the Indian higher education system and hence the need for increased finances and resources to be made available to NAAC.

Such feedback from an international perspective has been valuable to NAAC to rethink some of the issues and be convinced of the stand already taken on a few other issues. For example, the questions of voluntary *v.* mandatory accreditation and of institutional *v.* departmental accreditation have been well addressed by NAAC.

Research

A research project on 'Perception of quality in higher education by the stakeholders' has been initiated and the first phase has been completed. As part of NAAC's research and developmental activities, a mid-term review of the assessment process has been carried out, of which the impact analysis formed an integral component. The outcome of these research initiatives has been useful to address certain issues of concern.

Meta-evaluation

After having assessed roughly 100 institutions, NAAC conducted an evaluation of its procedures by collecting feedback from the

accredited institutions and assessors. The analysis of the feedback was discussed in a meeting and the outcome was published. The overall analysis indicated that NAAC's procedures are workable but may need fine-tuning in a few aspects. The details of the evaluation are given in *Chapter X*. The openness with which NAAC carried out the evaluation instilled confidence among academia.

NAAC's efforts at meta-evaluation are not a one-time affair. After the major event of collecting feedback from the first 100 accredited institutions, it has become a regular feature. Any institution that completes six months after accreditation receives a questionnaire from NAAC seeking feedback on the different aspects of NAAC's methodology and requesting details of the impact of the assessment on the institution. The feedback is analyzed for aspects that should be fine-tuned. After every assessment visit, feedback is collected from members of the peer team in a structured format for perfecting the peer team visit. A round table for chairs is an annual feature where many issues of evaluating NAAC's process are taken up in intensive discussions.

Through the efforts mentioned above, NAAC has been able to assure its stakeholders of its independent and autonomous stature and commitment to quality. Institutions that experienced the assessment visit also strengthened NAAC by implementing quality-enhancement strategies suggested in the assessment report, thus setting models to be emulated by other institutions. The positive impact of NAAC's process on institutions stands as a testimony to the intrinsic benefits of accreditation. Most of the problems related to attitude and lack of motivation have been solved.

VIII. THE ACCREDITATION EXPERIENCE OF ABC COLLEGE

The accreditation experience of an imaginary institution is given below. The main aim of this hypothetical case is to present issues and concerns of institutions from their perspective. It also presents the various stages of the accreditation process that a typical college undergoes. It should be noted that the stages may be the same but the experiences of each stage and the internal conflicts that arise vary from institution to institution. There have been visits where faculty members were indifferent to the peer team. NAAC has received complaints from faculty members that they had never seen the self-study report and that the management did it very secretly with boosted data. The aim of this case study is not to discuss those deviations but to present the situation as it might happen in a reasonably organized, honest institution. In fact, such institutions are the majority.

It should be noted that this is only a hypothetical case. Nonetheless, parts of the case may resemble different institutions. For example, the structure of the management and the US collaboration may remind an Indian reader of the Christ College that has been accredited by NAAC, but the resemblance does not extend beyond that. The question of financial implications and the strategy adopted may be like the case of the Union Christian College and the Loretto College. The resemblance ends there. This is an effort to present most of the typical internal conflicts that an institution might experience in the assessment process and the case presented is only hypothetical.

The ABC College was founded in 1950 in the outskirts of Chennai, the capital of the state of Tamil Nadu, with the motto *Excellence and Service*. The congregation of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), an indigenous religious organization, runs the college. It is a co-educational institution affiliated to the Madras University (one of the first three modern universities of India) and a grant-in-aid college with 92 per cent of its financial support coming from the state government. At present the college caters to 4,028 students - with girls constituting 45 per cent of enrolment in courses approved by the Madras University. There are 142 students in programmes that involve a collaborative arrangement with the Philips University (USA). It is one of the well-known colleges of the state.

It was four years ago, in the beginning of the academic year 1997-1998, through the regular information bulletins of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) that most of the college faculty first came to know about such an agency. As a part of the 'reaching out' strategy, NAAC had collected the addresses of members of the faculty and sent an information pack to each one of them, including the principal. The members of the faculty were aware of similar agencies in the USA, which accredited schools, colleges and universities. In India, however, such an effort was not well known. Most of the faculty did not take the information pack seriously since they were busy with the beginning of the semester.

Meanwhile, meetings held by NAAC with government officials of the department of education, at the center, and states, resulted in some positive developments. Realizing the various ways in which assessment could enable states in promoting higher education, 4 out of 30 states acted with enthusiasm. In the state of Tamil Nadu, it resulted in the director of Collegiate Education sending a circular to all colleges of the state, around 400 in number, encouraging them to volunteer for accreditation. The circular also mentioned that the

government colleges (colleges directly managed by the state government), 46 in number, would undergo assessment in a phased manner.

It soon became clear that UGC was also promoting accreditation by NAAC. At the meeting of the syndicate of the University of Madras, the vice-chancellor (president of the university) reported that the university had volunteered for assessment as directed by the University Grants Commission (UGC). It was believed that UGC might link the development grant to the accreditation status of the universities.

Newspapers and popular magazines published both verified and unverified information on the seriousness of the idea that the central government linked funding with accreditation by NAAC. One of the monthly magazines of repute published an interview with the chairperson of NAAC. The focus of the interview was on the benefits of accreditation for the various stakeholders – institutions, students, parents, funding agencies and the government. The president of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) found it interesting and sent the clippings of the interview to the other executive committee members of the PTA and to the principal.

Getting started

The positive approach of the state government, UGC, university and the media attracted the attention of the principal, who took up these developments for discussion with the board of management that comprises only members of the CMI religious order, which runs the college. The college had a review on its performance in the late seventies, which was a rewarding experience, yet for over 20 years the college had not formally monitored the quality of education it was offering to its students. Results were excellent and the rest was

left to chance. In the light of the earlier experience, the board of management felt that NAAC's process would be a good exercise for the growth of the college.

The principal expressed his conviction that assessment by a national agency such as NAAC would definitely help place the college on the national scene. In the state of Tamil Nadu, the college was well known for its programmes in computer science and management that had been attracting students from different states of India and from abroad. Moreover, the college had a few collaborative arrangements in the pipeline, apart from the ongoing arrangement with the Philips University of the USA. The principal believed that any certification of quality could only improve the image of the college at both national and international levels.

Following the interest of the management, the College Council, which is the decision-making body next only to the Board of Management, discussed the details contained in the information pack (previously sent to the college by NAAC) at one of its meetings. The membership of the College Council includes the principal, vice-principal, superintendent of the administrative section, superintendent of the finance section, all heads of departments, elected representatives of faculty and staff and nominees of both state government and university. Decisions taken by the College Council have a bearing on administrative aspects and are to be approved by the Board of Management. While the Board of Management deals with administrative aspects and broad policies, it is the College Council that decides on day-to-day functioning of the college and academic matters.

There was a mixed reaction. As far as the academic merits of the process are concerned, there was a consensus that such an assessment would help the college develop in line with national trends. However, some felt that the college was well known for its quality and did not

need, therefore, the stamp of quality from a new agency. Many felt that accreditation would mean nothing immediate in terms of financial aid or a specific kind of benefit, as clearly indicated in the NAAC bulletins, and they were of the opinion that it was not a very attractive prospect. Some reserved their judgement and were curious to know more about the concept of accreditation, the priorities of NAAC and parameters for accreditation, which were not very clear in the information brochures. The College Council resolved that more information should be obtained from NAAC and made available to all faculty and staff. It was also decided that the entire faculty should be consulted on this issue, the best occasion for this being the Faculty Meeting, which is attended by all faculty.

In response to the letter from the principal of the college, through which he expressed his interest in accreditation and sought additional information, NAAC sent detailed manuals and guidelines. The guidelines clearly spelt out the eligibility criteria to volunteer for accreditation, the difference between existing mandatory regulations and the framework of accreditation, various stages of the process, the outcome and financial implications. Photocopies of the material were sent to all departments for them to be thoroughly scrutinized by the faculty. It was then discussed at the faculty meeting that spread over two sessions. Non-faculty members of the Board of Management and the College Council were invited for the second half of the meeting.

Initial apprehensions

The methodology suggested in the manual was appealing to the faculty. It mentioned the self-study report that is to be prepared by the college and validated by a team of peers. The transparency in the process and the expected outcome were acceptable. The focus of the data collection as indicated by NAAC - functioning of the institution - also seemed meaningful to the college.

The various guidelines given for data collection and data analysis were appreciated. The structured format for collecting data on the functioning of the college, included in the manual, seemed to be both simple and workable. However, in many places the format required data for the past five years and faculty were doubtful about its feasibility. For aspects like alumni profile, job placement, progression to higher education, etc., the college did not have a systematic way of maintaining the data. The faculty thus feared that collecting data might prove to be problematic.

Some of the student support services were being taken care of in a very informal but effective manner. The remedial teaching was very effective, but was left to the responsibility of departments. However, one or two departments had discontinued remedial teaching on the ground that they had very competent students who did not need remedial teaching. Guidance and counselling services were also managed at the department level, mostly by the enthusiastic members of the faculty. Job placement was never a serious issue since the college had earned a good reputation on the job market and most of the students, always guided by faculty, found it easy to find an appropriate job. The college never saw the necessity to allocate these responsibilities and/or formalize the strategy. Nevertheless, the NAAC manual required data on how well structured these services actually were. The faculty members were sceptical about the usefulness of such data and feared that it could be viewed as a weakness of the institution.

The time to be spent on preparing the report was also questioned by the faculty. Under the semester system of instruction, with the dates of the end-semester examinations being fixed by the parent university, faculty members were always under pressure to finish the courses in time. Two vacancies in faculty positions – in the department

of English and the department of mathematics – were yet to be filled. In grant-in-aid colleges, since government funding supports the salary of the faculty, sanction from the state government is essential to recruit faculty. For the past two years the college had attempted to receive state agreement to advertise for the positions, which had not come through. Consequently, the workload had to be shared by the faculty in position and they were already overburdened. With these pressures, the preparation of the self-study report would imply more workload. Faculty members were not sure how much more time and efforts would be needed from each one of them and whether the additional workload could be shared smoothly.

The accreditation cost was seen as a major stumbling block by the management, but NAAC announced verbally that the accreditation cost was an admissible item of expenditure under the UGC grant. The finance officer of the college was not sure, however, of the head of expenditure under which that could be placed. The regional office of UGC, normally capable of clearing these doubts, had no idea of the accreditation cost, which made the management feel quite uncomfortable. Some members of the Board of Management felt that, with limited resources, spending on a voluntary process would not be a wise decision.

Within NAAC's fee structure, the accreditation expenditure has two components – accreditation fees and expenditure for the peer team visit. The accreditation fee is calculated according to the college's faculty of studies. If the college only offers programmes in the arts, the fee would be Rs.25,000 (approximately US\$500), whereas for arts and science it would be Rs.50,000. For a college that offers programmes in arts, science and commerce, the fee would be Rs.75,000. Apart from this, both travel and accommodation expenses of the peer team must be borne by the institution. The institution pays the actual travel expenses with some incidental allowances, as

well as for peers' accommodation, while NAAC pays them a nominal honorarium. For a three-member team to a college, apart from the accreditation fee, the peer team expenditure may vary from Rs.50,000 to 1,000,000. For a college of average size, the total accreditation expenditure may be about Rs.1,500,000 (US\$3,000).

Competing demands for greater resource allocation were registered, especially during that year, from the departments of computer science and management, and from the librarian and the hostel warden. Some members of the Board of Management felt that it would be better to invest in the library and/or the computer centre than spend for accreditation.

The principal appreciated the concept of assessment as an exercise in partnership. The NAAC guidelines emphasized that it would be a transparent process and that the assessment team would share the issues of concern with him. It was surprising to note that the assessment team would even give the draft assessment report to the institution on the last day of the visit. Could the team do a thorough job and give an assessment report after only three days?

As the discussions went on, more doubts and questions were voiced. Is it worth spending money, time and efforts on this process? What are the advantages? To what extent is the accreditation objective? How can the peer team assess the college in three days? What benchmarks has NAAC developed for accreditation? How can a three-year-old agency assess a fifty-year-old institution?

It was evident at the faculty meeting that the principal was convinced of the merits of the process. Although most of the other members wanted to support the principal, there was some hesitation among a group of senior staff. They seemed beset with fears and apprehensions and looked upon it as a threatening experience.

Winning over the senior staff and putting them at ease was a major hurdle to be overcome by the principal. As far as some of their genuine questions on the autonomy and reliability of NAAC were concerned, the principal did not have a clear answer and it was resolved that an interaction with NAAC be arranged.

Interaction with NAAC

NAAC extended its help generously and sent a senior officer to address the faculty and clear their doubts. A half-day interaction was arranged with the NAAC officer. Following a standard presentation on the process and outcome, the floor was open to discussion. The NAAC officer allayed most of the doubts and fears of the faculty. The college understood accreditation as an enabling process towards self-improvement.

The question of financial implications was also sorted out when the management was given a copy of the UGC circular, which noted that *"the colleges be advised to seek accreditation from NAAC and required fees of NAAC be met from development grants already paid and to be paid in future to the colleges under plan"*. The NAAC officer agreed to convey this to the regional office of UGC and gave an interesting calculation to show that money should not be an issue for an institution. Since the outcome of assessment would be valid for five years, and considering the college had 4,000 students, per-year per-student expenditure would work out to Rs.10. There had been instances in other states where the parent-teacher associations had readily come forward to meet the accreditation cost. The per-student expenditure argument was convincing to all and the president of the parent-teacher association suggested, and supported, that an additional fee of Rs.25 be collected from every student.

Many faculty members also feared that the assessment by NAAC might pass judgement on individual teachers and that any kind of negative remark could be used by the institution against the teachers. The NAAC officer allayed this fear by explaining that NAAC would solely examine the contribution of the teaching community and would not focus on individual teachers. Furthermore, the contribution of the teaching community of the institution would be one of the many aspects of assessment.

The hesitation about collection of data and their non-availability was resolved by the explanation that data in such cases could be approximate. The faculty was relieved to learn that NAAC had introduced a few queries to trigger better documentation in the institutions and, even if the institutions could not present data on those guidelines, NAAC would not take a penalizing stand.

With time and instruction on the aims of NAAC, the prevailing attitude among faculty was one of initial acceptance and eventually of positive enthusiasm. In the meeting of the Board of Management, it was resolved that the college would immediately apply for accreditation. A formal 'letter of intention' was sent to the director of NAAC with the basic data about the college, which included the year of establishment of the college, affiliation status, number of teachers, student enrolment and programmes offered. The letter of intent also required information on whether the governing body had decided to volunteer for accreditation and details of the contact.

Initiating the process

NAAC accepted the letter of intent for accreditation. This was in July 1998. Further modalities of preparation for accreditation had to be worked out. The manual sent by NAAC suggested a steering committee be established to work on the self-study report. The

formation of the steering committee was an initial problem. Who would be on this committee? This at first led to some unease among the faculty. It became progressively clear that the involvement of all was essential and a team that was acceptable to all was gradually formed. A steering committee was formally constituted of two senior teachers, two junior lecturers, the finance officer and the students' representative. For practical reasons it was decided that the principal would be the chairperson of the steering committee.

The data collection procedure and the time schedule were agreed upon after opening the process to the whole teaching community and its administrative staff. Everyone felt that the entire process should be completed during that academic year. The following schedule was agreed upon on 14 August 1998, though the committee realized later that it was an ambitious plan:

- *collection of data from departments and administrative units – mid-September 1998;*
- *preparation of draft report – mid-October 1998;*
- *circulation of draft report and receiving feedback – end-October 1998;*
- *preparation of self-evaluation report and its circulation – November 1998;*
- *finalization and submission of the report – December 1998;*
- *peer team visit – any time from January to March 1999, avoiding holidays.*

The steering committee decided to reach out to as many as possible from the college community – faculty, students, past pupils, parents, guardians and well-wishers in the academic and corporate sectors. Sub-committees were formed with specific responsibilities to collect data for the various criteria. Assigning specific criteria to members for data collection was done with much deliberation after

ascertaining that the committee member in charge would be able to do a good job without depending excessively on his/her formal status as member of the steering committee. The steering committee was encouraged to co-opt others from the college community. The committee also decided that it would meet every Thursday for an hour in the afternoon to review the developments. The first stage being the data collection from departments, it was agreed that all heads of departments would be invited to exchange notes at Thursday meetings during the months of August and September.

Preparing the self-study report

Completing the self-study report was not at all an easy task. First of all, clearing the doubts of the departments on data collection and on the interpretation of the questions given in the format was a tremendous assignment. The steering committee wanted the report to reflect in a very democratic way whatever input the various departments gave. Naturally, some of them may not have given all the information that could have gone into the report if it were to be prepared by a professional. No public relations exercise went into the preparation and tabulation of the data and the report.

The college had kept no records of student achievements and 'where to find what' was an almost impossible task. Yet a spirit of determination seemed to grip both faculty and students as they searched for records and evidence of excellent achievements in the archives and the greatest efforts were made by eminent past pupils - and there were many.

Though all documents were preserved, as the college was almost 50 years old, the filing system required much updating and sorting. This frustrating task eventually gave much satisfaction and, with it, the realization that efficient and meticulous filing was important.

Following the suggestion of NAAC, organized mechanisms for data collection and analysis were introduced wherever they were non-existent within the college. For example, efforts were made towards updating alumni profiles; the student services section opened a Career Counselling Cell.

Departments too began to collect information on past pupils. Departments that hitherto were just part of a whole, began to develop a sense of identity that brought interest and life to the disciplines. Each section of the college began to experience growing vitality. Slowly the study began to take shape.

At this point, there was a news item in the quarterly newsletter of NAAC about a workshop on assessment and accreditation to be held at Bangalore, capital of the neighbouring state and headquarters of NAAC. Since it was an initiative of state government, financial support to attend that workshop was available only to this state's institutional representatives. However, the principal did suggest that members of the steering committee be facilitated to attend the workshop with financial support from the college itself. The committee felt that it would help the college have more direct interaction with NAAC officers, as well as help it to seek clarifications and bridge many communication gaps. The second-in-command of the steering committee, the head of the Department of Commerce and Management, was nominated by the steering committee and the principal obtained NAAC's approval for his participation without any financial burden to NAAC. It turned out to be very useful in the analysis of the self-study report and in communicating with NAAC.

A sense of commitment and teamwork pervaded in the college. What was noticeable was that there was not much thought of the end result in this process. The process itself was rewarding. The sense of teamwork was not restricted to faculty alone. Many others

expressed interest and gave co-operation, which resulted in the realization that the college community comprised more than just teachers and students. After a dozen phone calls to NAAC about the interpretation of the format, and three meetings with heads of departments, the input from the departments was making headway.

The seven criteria to be encompassed by self-analysis concerned the whole life of the college, simply and comprehensively. A vision of the future emerged from the self-evaluation itself. After much hard work, writing, introspection, consulting and reflecting, the draft report was prepared and circulated within departments. The committee was already, however, one month behind schedule. Contrary to the expectations of the steering committee, every department produced more and more input which they thought would be valid after having seen the way in which the other departments had projected their achievements. It was almost as if the report was done again, which took another month. Redoing the report did help, however, as various issues of concern emerged that needed the immediate attention of the institution. Future plans were evolved to address those issues. The self-analysis was once again circulated and discussed for truthfulness and feasibility, pointing out strengths, weaknesses and the strategies of the institution to build on its strengths and set right the weak links. This led to a further delay of three weeks.

The final report was voluminous, running to 400 pages and organized into three spiral-bound volumes. Volume one contained the profile of the college and its input for the seven criteria of assessment, according to the guidelines of NAAC. Volume two concerned the department-wise input collected from every department according to NAAC's format. Volume three was the actual self-study that contained the self-analysis of the college regarding its strengths, weaknesses and future plans. Wherever necessary, annexes

had been added. The college had multiple copies made of the report that were available in various places such as departmental staff rooms, the library, office of the PTA, etc.

The steering committee learned from the Director of Collegiate Education that the length of time taken by the ABC College to finalize the self-study report was much longer than that of some of the very large universities. However, the steering committee felt that it had done a thorough job and submitted five sets of the report with annexes to NAAC in February 1999. At this stage there was relief that the most important part of the process had been completed. The college requested NAAC to arrange for the on-site visit before 15 April 1999, when university examinations would begin. NAAC agreed to expedite the process.

Peer team visit

NAAC informed the college of the peer team visit within two weeks' time. The college received a panel of names and was asked to indicate any reservations it might have on these. The list consisted of 25 names. The vice-principal recollected that one of the members of the panel had applied for the post of principal three years beforehand, without actually turning up for the interview. The college did not have, however, any reservations about that member. Nonetheless, the management felt that this information should be passed on to NAAC and included it when rendering the college's opinion of the panel. When NAAC communicated the final composition of the peer team, the name of this member was not on the final list.

The peer team consisted of the following:

Dr Ananth (Chairperson);
Dr Hameeda (Member);
Dr Devaraj (Member).

The composition of the peer team denotes the special care that is taken to choose experienced educationists for this role. The specialization of the members was also well balanced: English literature and management (Dr Ananth); physics and computer science (Dr Hameeda); botany (Dr Devaraj). These were all areas in which the college had either a research programme or collaboration with the USA. The college was pleased that the peer team would correctly note its strengths. However, a small fraction of the faculty did not approve of Dr Devaraj, who came from a state university and did not possess any college experience, and the Botany department was worried that he would expect university standards of research.

The visit of the peer team was fixed for April 1999. Even though it was dreaded, the actual visit turned out to be a very positive experience for all.

Mention must be made of the excellent communication that NAAC had with the college prior to the visit – communication that set the college at ease. The checklist that was provided by NAAC to steer the on-site visit covered all aspects to be taken care of. It included facilities to be provided for the team, both at the institution and at the place of stay, sessions that required the presence of the principal, the agenda for each session, as well as all 'do's and don'ts' in general. The programme was planned with care, in consultation with the college, and every detail of the on-site visit was planned, so well that one session smoothly flowed into the other. In order to suit the convenience of the Board of Management and the Student Council, minor changes were made in a few sessions of the visit schedule. The steering committee was consulted for all logistics and arrangements.

As advised by NAAC, the college sent a detailed circular, to all staff members, concerning the peer team's visit. Past pupils and parents were invited for interaction with the peer team. The college

community was informed that anyone should feel free to approach the peer team, without disturbing the pre-planned schedule. Open sessions, when members of the team were free for such interaction, were given adequate publicity. Circulars and the detailed session-wise visit schedule were placed on the notice boards and copies were made available to the entire faculty and staff. All circulars and announcements emphasized that the purpose of the team visit was to 'assess the quality of education and not to find faults or redress grievances'.

During its visit to the college, the team was able to examine all physical and infrastructure facilities and it interacted with the management, the principal, faculty, staff, students, parents and alumni. The team verified the documents for further clarifications, assisted by an NAAC officer. While the various sessions were times of probing, they also proved to be sessions of further learning, and representatives of the institution were conscious that even peer members spent this time among themselves on reflection and dialogues. A brief account of the team visit is given below.

Day 1. 4 April 1999

■ Session 1.

2.00 to 4.00 p.m. Peer team discussion-I, at the hotel

The team had confidential meetings in a discussion room provided for it at its place of stay. Although members of the college were not involved in the peer team discussions, the agenda of the discussion was open to everyone, as explicitly mentioned in the detailed visit schedule sent by NAAC. The college was aware that the team had the following agenda:

- briefing by the chairperson of the team;
- compare notes on the tentative evaluation;

- identify strengths and weaknesses;
- identify issues that need further probing;
- share the responsibility of collecting evidence.

■ *Session 2.*

4.15 to 5.00 p.m. Meeting with the principal and steering committee at the college

The principal gave a historical and contextual presentation of the college and then described the specific departments. This session provided background information. The steering committee could sense that the peer team was becoming restless because of considerable time spent on the rather descriptive presentation. A handout for this slides presentation was provided. The brief interaction had to cover the agenda elaborated by the peer team for that meeting. There were also queries seeking more clarifications.

■ *Session 3.*

5.00 to 6.00 p.m. Meeting with the Board of Management and College Council

With five members of the Board plus six additional members of the College Council, 30 minutes were spent on the question of vacancies in faculty positions, 5 minutes on the role of the principal, 5 minutes on campus matters and 15 minutes on future plans of the institution. The rationale behind the range and intensity of the questions was difficult to see. The management was disappointed that the peer team did not realize that the situation of faculty vacancies had to be remedied by the state government. However, the principal felt that good relationships were initiated and open communication was established.

■ *Session 4.*

8.00 to 9.00 p.m. Peer team discussions-II, at the hotel

Confidential discussions were held among peer team members. The agenda for this team discussion as outlined in the visit schedule was as follows:

- discuss the evidence collected so far;
- agree on the tentative criterion score using the frame of reference;
- identify the issues to be checked further;
- share the responsibility of report writing.

Computers and printers had already been installed in the discussion room. Arrangements had also been made for secretarial assistance, but the team members decided to type the initial impressions themselves. The steering committee co-ordinator was informed that at the draft stage the team would like to keep its remarks confidential and it would need secretarial assistance only on the last day.

Day 2. 5 April 1999

■ *Session 5.*

9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. and 2.00 to 3.00 p.m. Visiting the various units of the college

The team visited all departments, accompanied by a member of the steering committee, who did not stay with the team, however, whenever it interacted with faculty. A half-hour was programmed for each department. The team gained an overview of the institution, after meeting most of the academic staff, seeing the physical resources and the ambiance of the institution. However, some of the visits were too intensive, especially those to the largest departments, and allowed for little dialogue between staff and the team. The team seemed too exhausted in the afternoon to be able to absorb information.

The visit to the department of computer science was unpleasant. The Head of Department (HoD) gave a 25-minute presentation, despite the chairperson's request for it to be brief. The HoD was very nervous and spoke so rapidly that it was almost impossible to follow. There was no meaningful dialogue. The visit to the science departments enabled them to present a good overall picture of the laboratory and research facilities of the college.

■ *Session 6.*

3.00 to 4.00 p.m. Interaction with a representative group of students

■ *Session 7.*

4.00 to 5.00 p.m. Interaction with parents and alumni

Only 56 students attended the first meeting but they were representative of all departments. Thirty-two turned up for the next meeting. The peer team later expressed the opinion that these were probably the most informative and lively meetings held during the visit. The students were articulate and constructive. Issues raised were excellent signposts for the college and were subsequently followed up more thoroughly by the team. The invitees for these interactions were neither hand picked nor coached and the peer team expressed its appreciation for their refreshing spontaneity and noted that sometimes the best interactions were those not orchestrated.

■ *Session 8.*

5.00 to 5.30 p.m. Checking documentary evidence

The manual for self-study provides the list of documents the team might like to see. These documents had been arranged in the discussion room in the college. The team spent some time checking, reading and reflecting on the documents. The documents selected by the chairperson for further reading were sent to the discussion room in the hotel.

■ *Session 9.*

7.00 to 9.00 p.m. Peer team discussion-III, at the hotel

The team meeting began at 7.00 p.m. and lasted for an hour, with the following agenda:

- discuss the provisional criterion scores in the light of the frame of reference;
- agree on the highlights of the draft report;
- identify outstanding issues to be shared with the principal.

The meeting should have lasted two hours according to the agreed timetable, but the Board of Management had arranged a dinner. The NAAC officer was very displeased with this arrangement and insisted that changes should only be initiated with the previous consent of the chairperson and team, if such changes were felt to be essential and in the interests of the visit. The institution had been told, prior to the visit, that it should agree to the programme with the NAAC officer and later stick to it, and that it should not arrange for such activities. However, the arrangement made by the Board of Management, with the chairperson's permission, could not be avoided.

Day 3. 6 April 1999

■ *Session 10.*

8.00 to 11.00 a.m. Visiting support services and administrative units

This session had been scheduled to start at 8.00 a.m., but the team arbitrarily decided to spend an hour in team discussions (to make up for the time lost the previous day) and start visiting units at a later time. The less-tolerant groups raised objections to such a change and inconvenience. This was the second significant change in the programme.

When the team arrived at the campus, a clear 20-minute introduction was given on the administrative units. The members spent some time inquiring about scales of pay and welfare measures and their questions were clearly answered. The questions had a clear rationale and this meeting was very focused. Visits were made to the library, male and female students' residences and game fields. A social visit to the temporary student canteen for a cool drink was a welcome interlude in the busy schedule.

■ *Session 11.*

11.00 a.m. to 12.00 p.m. Discussion with the principal on outstanding issues

The team spent time with the principal, sharing issues of concern and obtaining additional input from him on these particular issues. The chairperson was both open and responsive and the session was helpful. The team had prepared the discussion on outstanding issues, which favoured meaningful interaction. This discussion allowed the principal to reiterate some of the developments in progress: updating the computer laboratory, improving library facilities by automation, etc., initiatives that were just beginning to take shape when the self-study report had been submitted.

■ *Session 12.*

12.00 to 3.00 p.m. Report writing

The team spent time drafting and editing the report. Secretarial assistance was provided.

■ *Session 13.*

3.00 to 4.00 p.m. Sharing the report with the principal

The draft report was shared with the principal, who was not pleased with some of the observations found in the report, such as recommending that priority be given to increasing access to the

Internet, centralized computer facilities and automation of the library services, since these steps were already in progress. He insisted that the team should modify that statement. Other evaluative remarks of the team and factual data given in the report were acceptable to him.

■ *Session 14.*

4.00 to 5.00 p.m. Finalizing the report and institutional score

Although the peer team revised the above-mentioned sentence to which an objection had been made, the principal felt that this part of the report still had a negative tone, whereas if the college had submitted the report two months later all of these mechanisms would have been well established. The other evaluative remarks seemed to be satisfactory and the principal agreed to the report. The members of the peer team as well as the principal signed the report. The institutional score was still confidential.

■ *Session 15.*

5.00 to 5.30 p.m. Exit meeting

The exit meeting was held in a large auditorium with approximately 100 academic staff members present. The team was seated on the stage. Dr Ananth, chairperson of the team, presented briefly the highlights of the team's assessment. Faculty members of computer science were disappointed that their department received no commendation, although it offered two prestigious most sought-after programmes. Contrary to their initial apprehensions, the faculty members of botany were pleased that their project mode of training undergraduates was well recognized. The chairperson briefly pointed out areas that could be strengthened further. The meeting ended with the chairperson presenting a copy of the signed draft report to the principal.

Post-assessment scene

Waiting for the grade

The team left the institution without disclosing any clue whatsoever on the scores or grades obtained. The institution had, however, the draft report to act upon, and although it was not yet finalized, and needed further processing by NAAC, the institution was permitted to discuss the report internally. Though there were a few criticisms of the report, especially concerning one or two evaluative remarks that were not based on substantive evidence, the overall feedback from the faculty was very positive. The principal was in a dilemma as to the relative importance of the various recommendations. He felt that the priorities of the recommendations were very vague. Should the question of faculty vacancies be treated on par with improving canteen facilities? It was not clear.

The management could not accept several recommendations that were apparently biased and based on uninformed impressions of the team. For example, missionaries had the tradition of decision-making at two levels - on both the Board of Management and the College Council. These two bodies had always supported each other's initiatives, needs and enjoyed an excellent interpersonal relationship. The peer team's recommendation that persons from outside the religious order be invited to sit on the Board of Management, with a view to introducing a new way of thinking, was not acceptable to the management. At the college level, the representation of the faculty, staff and various nominees already provided the College Council with new thinking and the management never had conflicting situations with the College Council. In the management's view, this recommendation had only unnecessarily sensitized an issue.

The management also criticized the fact that the 'language of evaluation' found in the report was very vague. As a missionary

institution the college had a clear goal to serve the poor and needy. The report commended this goal, but also mentioned the necessity for it to be well articulated in order for it to be adequately reflected in the academic programme. Making recommendations on issues that were beyond the control of the college seemed irrelevant to the management. Who should take the responsibility for action that was beyond the control of the institution, such as filling faculty positions? Would all of these issues affect the institutional grade?

Along with these doubts, the college had an agonizing waiting period of three months since the report and the grade had to be approved by the EC of NAAC. In view of the recommendations for further improvement given in the report, some felt that the college would only receive a four-star grade. Others felt that they had done an excellent job in projecting themselves truthfully, in comparison to a few other colleges that had been rated with 'five stars', and that ABC College should have the top grade. In a few months the letter from NAAC declared that the Executive Committee of NAAC was pleased to award the accredited status to ABC College at the five-star level.

After the five-stars

The accredited status did not at first bring many direct benefits or advantages to the college, but some indirect benefits resulted through the follow-up of the assessment report. The peer team's opinions and suggestions found in the report triggered a type of process in the college for further improvement. Taking note of the remarks on the vision and mission, the college attempted to clarify its vision and mission for all, and tried to fine-tune its academic activities accordingly. A committee consisting of the heads of departments and faculty representatives was formed and, from within this committee, a core committee was selected to study and

discover a mission that everybody could adopt as his/her own. The college wanted the revised mission to permeate all its activities.

The process of assessment and accreditation brought to the fore the need to both present the institution before the accrediting agency and to keep a record of all activities carried out within the college. This was not a concern at all before venturing into assessment, as everyone was busy with routine activities.

The college could advertise itself as a highly rated accredited college and the newly acquired status was mentioned in the college handbook and admission brochures. The following academic year saw distinct changes in the number of applications received by the college. There had always been a demand for admission to the college but it was much higher in the year 2000–2001. Another change was seen in student preferences. For the past few years there had been a lot of applications for computer science and management programmes, whereas the demand for basic sciences was decreasing. This was the scenario throughout the country. However, the situation was different for ABC College during the academic year 2000–2001. The demand for their two basic science programmes, which were commended in the assessment report for some of their unique initiatives, recorded an increase.

The accredited status did help the college obtain more support for new initiatives. Funding agencies very quickly cleared proposals that had been submitted by the faculty for national conferences and minor research projects. Some private industries volunteered to sponsor laboratory equipment and training faculty for the use of sophisticated equipment. Many other institutions approach members of the college on the process, benefits and requirements for accreditation. The college is progressively emerging as a leader in its neighbourhood.

Time taken by the ABC College for the various stages of assessment

Stage-I. Awareness

Information bulletin to faculty by NAAC	- July 1997
Circular from DCE	- August 1997
Meeting at the university	- August 1997
Media coverage and PTA awareness	- October 1997
Discussion with management	- December 1997

Stage-II. Analysis

Discussion at the College Council	- January 1998
Getting material from NAAC	- February 1998
Faculty meeting	- March 1998
Interaction with NAAC officer	- April 1998

(May and June—summer holidays)

Stage-III. Commitment

Letter of intent	- July 1998
Data collection	- August–November 1998
Circulation of draft report to faculty	- December 1998
Revising the report	- January 1999
Report submission to NAAC	- February 1999

Stage-IV. Assessment

On-site visit	- April 1999
Final outcome	- July 1999

This case study should be interpreted against the background of this institution. In practice institutions vary a lot in their attitude towards assessment and their leadership, and hence also in the time they need for each stage given above. There have been instances where the institution started the process soon after reading the promotional material and took just a week to finalize the report, e.g. Smt Vithaldas Thackeray College of Home Science, Mumbai – a single faculty institution with six departments. There are also institutions that have been in the first stage of clearing their doubts for more than three years.

Another difference that has to be noted is the 'type of institution'. In view of the large number of colleges that are to be assessed (around 12,600), the case of a college was taken up for this case study. Nonetheless, universities have a major role in providing academic leadership to colleges. Issues that may arise out of affiliating functions and tension between teaching and research may be additional dimensions to the functioning of a university. However, internal conflicts on accreditation are similar. Compared to a college, a typical Indian university is much larger in size, and accordingly the size of the peer team, time spent for the on-site visit, and the use of subject specialists to assess professional areas, etc., are taken care of by NAAC. The similarities are significantly greater than the differences in the way in which institutions experience the assessment exercise.

suggestions for revision, improvement, in

IX. THE IMPACT

The process of assessment and accreditation by NAAC makes the institution itself the primary beneficiary. However, the benefits of assessment outcome extend to a number of secondary beneficiaries. The impact analysis performed by NAAC indicates that external quality assurance, as promoted by NAAC, has made a significant impact on all stakeholders. This chapter discusses the major findings of this analysis.

Impact on providers

Although NAAC was established about seven years ago, there was very limited response from universities and colleges for accreditation in the first three years, possibly because it is only a voluntary option on the part of institutions, with a tacit understanding that funding agencies as stakeholders would take the assessment outcome into consideration for funding.

When the linkage between assessment outcome and policy decisions by apex bodies was not explicit, institutions were reluctant to accept NAAC's process. The situation changed with the policy announcement by MHRD and UGC setting a time limit for universities and colleges to be assessed by the end of the year 2000 (later extended to December 2001 and again to 2002) and 2003 respectively. Only universities that undergo assessment will be eligible for development grants from UGC. Though institutions have realized that UGC and MHRD are only following their mandate of assessment before providing funds, fixing a time limit has been criticized and some consider it as being imposed.

The outcome of assessment has been used not only for funding purposes but for other decision-making as well. Recently, the state government of Tamil Nadu, with the aid of the State Council for Higher Education, resolved to recommend only those colleges that are accredited and rated high for either autonomous or deemed-to-be university status. Similar moves are current in a few states like Bihar and Karnataka. Recently the Quality Council of India, the organization that undertakes the review for the International Standards Organization, has indicated that in the higher education sector, only accredited institutions will be considered for certification. These represent other types of linking. Some major funding agencies for research also look for the accreditation status of an institution, even if project proposals from individuals or groups are found to be acceptable.

While the analysis of impact on the institutions of HE is indicative of the significant changes accreditation has brought about, the same may not be said with reference to the policy makers and providers. Although established and funded by UGC, how far NAAC's advisory role will have a direct bearing on policy making is not yet clear. However, to play its facilitative role in policy transformation, NAAC has initiated the analysis of assessment reports in states where atleast 15% of HEIs are accredited by NAAC. It is expected that the outcome will map the quality of HE in those states with recommendations on quality and that could feed into the policy perspectives of the states.

The impact of NAAC's assessment on funding decisions is also not clear. There is a consensus that in a developing country like India, which has a long way to go in increasing access to higher education, linking assessment with basic funding may not be appropriate. But the expectations of stakeholders on incentives cannot be ignored. UGC has announced that it would sanction "development grants" only to the accredited institutions. But, UGC is a major provider only to

the Central Universities which number 18, a few colleges and some of the institutions accorded the status of 'Deemed to be Universities'. State Universities and colleges receive UGC support (less than 5% of their budget in most cases) only for certain development schemes. The major providers – the State governments are yet to take note of the assessment outcome of NAAC in a major way, except in two or three states. Suggestions have been given to the states that around 2% of the higher education budget should be allotted for quality improvement schemes and incentives. When some of these strategies become reality it would give more thrust to the accreditation process and the current trend is very positive.

Impact on the institutions

To understand the impact of assessment and accreditation, NAAC evolved a questionnaire (*Appendix 8*) in consultation with a few heads of institutions and chairpersons of peer teams. The questionnaires were piloted on 15 institutions and some minor improvements were incorporated. The questionnaires were then sent to the first hundred institutions that had undergone assessment and accreditation. Feedback was collected on approximately 20 aspects, which included the following:

1. motivation to volunteer;
2. expectations of the process while volunteering and how far those expectations were fulfilled;
3. preparation of the self-study report;
4. expectations about the peer team and how far those expectations were satisfied;
5. fairness of the peer team composition;
6. adequacy of looking for evidence;
7. documentary verification;

8. issues of concern;
9. recommendations made in the peer team report;
10. acceptance of the report among the faculty;
11. innovations made after the visit;
12. follow-up action.

A summary of the findings

On motivation

Institutions quoted varied motivating factors to volunteer for assessment:

1. to know the strengths and weaknesses of the institution;
2. need for an external agency to assess the strengths and weaknesses.

Responses from two colleges in a metropolitan city were different from the responses listed above. One feedback noted that magazines such as *India Today* had published a rank list of colleges without actually assessing facilities offered by the colleges. This had motivated them to volunteer for this databased objective assessment. Another college recorded: "Over the years, various surveys conducted by private agencies have consistently given a high rating to our institution. We were not sure how credible these ratings were. Accreditation is a good opportunity to verify the results of these reports".

Expectations

Many institutions indicated that even before undergoing the process, they were sure of the outcome and expected a high rating. This, in fact, substantiates the notion that only institutions that were confident of their potential, volunteered for assessment in the initial stage. By and large, their expectations were fulfilled and after

accreditation such institutions were able to recognize their strengths and weaknesses. Some of them realized that their expectation of a high rating had been wrong, even as they were preparing the self-study report. Furthermore, their interaction with the peer team during the assessment visit made them realize their inadequacies.

Preparation of the self-study report

Feedback on the preparation of the self-study report was also positive. Some institutions stated that they had been apprehensive about starting the process as they thought it would be difficult. As they progressed, nonetheless, they felt at ease and were glad to collect the data, including corroborative evidence. In the process of collecting data and working together, people became united and tended to overlook small differences. The preparation itself had triggered new practices within institutions. Apart from documentation and people working together, many institutional efforts were made to improve infrastructure and learning resources, and to initiate new mechanisms.

Expectations about the peer team

Most of the institutions mentioned that assessment by the members was impartial, sincere, honest, and objective and that the members had a cordial, sensitive, observant, down-to-earth attitude. However, there was one note of dissent, which stated that the team was satisfactory but seemed to concentrate on specific items, not bothering with other issues.

Fairness of the peer team composition

As far as the composition of the peer team was concerned, everyone agreed that it was fair; one institution recorded that the composition did not make a difference, since it was open to anyone.

Adequacy of looking for evidence

Most of the institutions (except three) agreed that the peers were fair when looking for evidence. The three who disagreed felt that an inadequate amount of time was spent on querying for evidence.

Documentary verification

The overall feedback was that documentary verification was complete and comprehensive without being intrusive. One institution recorded: "We were quite satisfied with the visiting team, except that, due to time constraints, the members of the team could not go through the large number of documents placed before them". Except for three institutions, all gave a firm positive response regarding the adequacy and non-intrusive nature of document verification.

Issues of concern

While most institutions found the sharing of issues of concern to be open and transparent, there were three among them that felt that it was not up to their expectations.

Recommendations made in the assessment report

General feedback on recommendations given by the peer team in the assessment report is that they were highly positive, instrumental for change and aimed at further development of the institution without any hint of personal bias. One institution stated that it was able to implement most of the suggestions given in the assessment report.

Acceptability of the report among the faculty

Acceptability has been generally satisfactory, except in a few cases where the institution with high expectations was disappointed by a lower grade outcome.

Changes that occurred due to the visit

This was found to be the richest part of the feedback sheet. One could see that institutions have become more open and sensitive to the needs of stakeholders. A new culture of increased participation, transparency and accountability in all sections of the institutions has emerged. The need to keep abreast of changing trends is felt by one and all, and institutions now find it easier to introduce innovations as everyone realizes the importance of coping with the needs of the present world.

Possible follow-up action

Various follow-up actions have been suggested and some go even beyond the purview of NAAC. Most of them are expectations in three areas – more funding or incentives or special status, networking among themselves and NAAC's guidance for further growth.

As more and more institutions are accredited, whatever emerges as an outcome of feedback analysis must be taken with caution regarding the reliability, validity, objectivity, adequacy and the representativeness of the data. At the time of the impact analysis, all of the above were assured since out of 118 institutions, the first 100 institutions (six months having elapsed since their assessment) were considered for feedback. For a meaningful follow-up, institutions need several months at least after assessment; hence institutions that were assessed later in time were intentionally left out of this consideration.

The analysis further revealed that NAAC's impact has been felt by institutions in all aspects of their functioning – pedagogical, managerial and administrative; the more significant aspects of this impact among them are mentioned below.

Ownership on quality matters

NAAC's process has made institutions realize that quality is the responsibility of the institutions themselves. Quality management procedures were introduced in some institutions. Especially, institutions that did not have such procedures in place before, initiated formal mechanisms. Management was often able to bring in major changes on the grounds that it would demonstrate a commitment to quality. For example, institutions introduced peer appraisal and student evaluation of teachers, issues that continue to be a bone of contention in many institutions elsewhere.

Focus on goals and objectives

During the first two years, NAAC's scheme of assessment was based on 10 major dimensions of functioning of institutions, called parameters. One of the parameters - institutional goals and objectives - examined the goal orientation of the institution. Even in the revised scheme of seven criteria, goals and objectives of the institution is a key aspect in the criterion '*curricular aspects*'. This forced institutions to initiate discussions on their specific goals and objectives and the means to achieve them. Institutions began making co-curricular provisions related to specific objectives and strengthening extension activities to realize the goals. Efforts were also made to have consultations to adapt goals to the contemporary as well as the larger needs of society and to make an appropriate choice of courses. The myth that they do not have a role in goals and course offerings was demystified.

Going beyond the constraints

The greatest effect of undergoing the process has been for institutions to take up innovative programmes beyond the mandatory requirements of the affiliating system. Institutions that were unhappy

with the systemic constraints of the affiliating mode realized that within the affiliating structure they could attempt many innovative strategies on their own.

Increase in programme options

The introduction of need-based programmes was observed in most institutions, which increased available programme options. Many institutions started their own certificate and diploma programmes to fulfil the growing demand from students.

Restructuring of curriculum

Autonomous institutions that had the freedom to innovate curriculum, and affiliated colleges that offered additional programmes of their own, restructured the curriculum. Some succeeded in introducing a credit system based on choice, which gives more freedom and flexibility to students and in some cases to the extent that a student could structure his/her own curriculum. The revision of curriculum content was accepted as an ongoing process instead of a routine to be undertaken once in three or five years. Institutions also understood effective ways of doing it, such as involving employers and peers.

Improvement in teaching-learning strategies

The attention of the institutions became focused on priorities and responsibilities, especially with reference to teaching/learning as their primary mission. In the scheme of assessment of NAAC, the criterion *teaching/learning and evaluation* carries the maximum weightage. It gave a positive stimulus to institutional attention and oriented institutions so as to improve their quality of teaching/learning by going beyond the routine examination-oriented outcome. The fact that teaching/learning has to be equal to or more important

than research became well understood – in universities as well. Improved teaching methods using educational technology, projects and student seminars, providing computer skills, encouraging co-curricular activities, and incorporating community orientation were observed.

Stimulating research culture

Research, consultancy and extension are part of the criteria for assessment that has stimulated a research culture which is more pronounced in colleges that were focusing only on teaching. Although the weightage allotted to this criterion is the least for affiliated colleges, it has encouraged faculty research at all levels including within affiliated undergraduate colleges. Improvement has been recorded in various research initiatives such as applying for projects, providing seed money for research initiatives, conducting seminars and symposia, providing support services for the faculty involved in research, deputing faculty to complete their research degrees and supporting efforts to publish. Some institutions have established research centres with liberal seed money from their governing bodies.

Improved documentation

Although some mentioned that the process of preparing the self-study report and getting ready for the assessment visit involved a lot of unnecessary documentation, most thought that it was a promising tool for improvement of their documentation, especially for teacher appraisal, student progression, alumni profiles and placement services. While the institutions geared up to record and manage data that would improve their performance, individual faculty members also realized the importance of maintaining regular teaching diaries, documentation of their academic contributions and other scholarly pursuits outside the institution, and data on their community-oriented services.

Improved student services (learning resources and support services)

The process of assessment focused the attention of institutions on support services within their reach, which they had never thought of before. There was observed improvement in student support such as open access and extended working hours of the library, acquiring the latest books and quality journals, establishing inter-library linkage, a centralized computer centre with provided access to it, placement cell, campus interviews, on-the-job training, guidance and counselling and financial assistance. Student activities were channelled towards skill development and leadership training.

More information technology

Most of the institutions improved their centralized computer facilities, providing easy access to students and teachers. The Internet was made available to all faculty members and restricted use of it was provided to postgraduate students and research scholars. Computer departments of many colleges initiated introductory courses for non-computer science students. Though information technology was being introduced into all institutions, NAAC's process made its need obvious within all sections of the institutions instead of confining the benefits to a few sections like the computer science department and the administrative office. Institutional efforts for its appropriate use and the preparation of its members for optimum use greatly improved. That led to the use of technology as a learning resource in the real sense by more faculty members. Computer-assisted learning packages were developed. Admission, examination and library services were computerized.

Human resources development

Training of staff in new communication technologies, faculty development programmes, and student activities gained a new thrust. They were seen as useful investments for the development of human resources of the institution. The faculty, staff and students were facilitated with an open and transparent policy.

Standing united

Small differences were forgotten and faculty and management became united. Since it was realized that quality enhancement was an institutional effort and not merely an outcome of an individual's conviction, it led to participatory and consultative decision-making to implement quality-enhancement strategies.

Greater inter-departmental interaction

The preparation of the self-study report requires input from all of the subunits within the institution and hence calls for co-operation. In this context, all subunits came closer to work together. Departments that were functioning like islands within the larger system began to share experiences and expertise. They came to know each other's achievements and good practices, which developed interdepartmental initiatives, intimacy and a new synergy. Team teaching, the faculty of one department handling specialized topics in another department, interdisciplinary course offerings and sharing of facilities are several measures that were strengthened.

Healthy competition among subunits

While the process encouraged subunits to appreciate the contribution of one another to the academic ambience of the institution, it also resulted in healthy competition among departments, with each unit attempting to maximize its contributions and achievements.

Rediscovering of self

Things taken for granted were rediscovered as being unique characteristics and strengths. Interaction with peers and employers to strengthen, and linkage with other institutions and industry to capitalize on these rediscovered potentials, collecting feedback from parents and alumni to further identify their strengths and weaknesses, and from students to improve their educational experiences and consultations with peers to overcome the weak links were all different initiatives that blossomed, and that required, in short, confidence, self-reliance and potential.

Triggering of healthy practices

Quality assessment triggered new healthy practices. Informal mechanisms such as student feedback on teaching and learning, and performance appraisal were institutionalized. Individual efforts towards organizing seminars, arranging for special lectures, enriching the syllabus with current topics, initiating students into the project mode and other innovative learner-centred activities were institutionalized. Dissemination of information on faculty development and strategies to tap the various schemes available for supporting research and development in the institution in general became well known and faculty members were encouraged to use these facilitating aspects.

Community orientation

Community-oriented activities increased: extending expertise to the development of the immediate neighbourhood, initiating research that would solve problems with the neighbourhood, student and faculty participation in those activities.

Change in policies and practices of management

Many colleges faced the problem of unequal pay scales among faculty, which was due to the expansion of colleges coupled with the state government's policy not to increase its funding. The state government generally gives its approval when a college wishes to initiate a new programme, if it fulfils the minimum requirements, and on the condition however, that any additional faculty posts that are necessary for running the new programmes are not supported by government funding. In such cases, the prevalent practice of management is to recruit faculty under 'ad hoc' appointments on a lower-salary basis paid through other sources of income. They are generally referred to as 'management-paid' faculty. For the same, or at times a greater, workload, the management-paid faculty may receive much less than faculty in a government-sanctioned position. A change in the way management considered the differential pay scales and efforts towards improving these (though scales on par would be difficult) could be observed. Management also changed its perception of issues of faculty workload, supporting the research culture and encouraging faculty development. The interpersonal relations between management and other units of the institutions improved. The style of management became participative and transparent, and involved other units in its decision-making.

Recognizing stakeholder expectations

The expectations of the employers, students and parents formed a substantial basis for many new initiatives of the institutions. New courses were initiated; skill-development components were incorporated in the curriculum. Opinions from students and parents were sought on educational experiences provided in the institution.

Greater involvement of students, parents and alumni

Alumni and parent involvement in improving the institution became explicit. Regular meetings with parents and alumni and receiving their feedback could be seen. The activities of the alumni association were revived. Institutions that did not have this type of association initiated them and collected alumni profiles. Student participation in certain decision-making and sharing of responsibilities of institutional activities was encouraged.

Inter-institutional networking

The curiosity of institutions as to how others proceeded within NAAC's frame of reference for assessment improved the dissemination of information and co-operative efforts among neighbouring colleges. Many highly rated institutions are exploring the possibility of establishing a network among themselves to initiate both student and staff exchange programmes.

Planning for the future

Institutions started thinking beyond routine teaching/learning and chalked out future initiatives. The focus on future projects became clear, and vision and mission documents and perspective plans were drawn up. Institutions also realized the importance of projecting their strengths and unique features to society in order to obtain good resources – funds, students and teachers.

Greater value of accreditation

Even institutions that volunteered for the process with apprehension have understood the great value of assessment after undergoing the process. Some institutions had initially volunteered because neighbouring institutions had done so, or because the

accreditation of NAAC was seen as a marketing strategy. They realized later, however, that the process of assessment had largely contributed to the revival and stimulation of the quality culture of the institution.

Impact of the assessors

Not all aspects of impact could be captured in the questionnaire. In addition to the impact revealed by collected data, the positive impact made by the assessors must not be ignored. Hundreds of assessors and peers who were involved in the various activities of NAAC – assessment exercise, awareness programmes and workshops – made a positive impact on their respective institutions, and those assessors and peers, in particular, who were involved in assessment visits became agents of change in their own institutions. They were able to dissipate the unfounded fears of their colleagues, and in many institutions became the nucleus of the assessment initiative and were invited to chair the steering committees. Neighbouring institutions approached them for consultation. Since NAAC has the policy not to invite assessors from the same state where the institution is located, the impact of the assessors quickly spread across the country. NAAC also made use of their services effectively as ambassadors for awareness programmes in those regions, as well as for identifying potential institutions for follow-up.

Assessors have also played an important role in the dissemination of healthy practices and innovative strategies among institutions. What they observe in an institution often triggers new developments in their parent institutions. Today, participation in an assessment visit is seen as a rewarding and challenging experience, though the remuneration paid by NAAC is very nominal and in no way matches the hard work put into this task by the assessors. Faculty members are happy, nonetheless, to include it (as recognition) in their curriculum vitae. Even the highly qualified and experienced experts

indicate that serving in assessment teams is equivalent to a faculty development programme in higher education administration.

There were also issues that were not very pleasant. In spite of the explanation that institutional uniqueness will be taken care of, institutions began to imitate the top-bracket institutions. The manuals developed by NAAC to facilitate the preparation of the self-study report have also contributed to this. The manuals give a generic format for data collection, which may contain a few questions that may not be relevant to a particular institution. Forgetting the generic nature of the format, for any aspect questioned in the manual, the institutions have hurriedly initiated those mechanisms. Furthermore, not all questions have value addition; some are only for data collection. Yet institutions have rushed to put all mechanisms in place. This may lead to a decrease in their diversity and create an institution tailor-made to the manual.

NAAC understood that, at times, those who met the peers had been carefully coached. In some institutions, interaction with representative groups of students or staff turned out to be sessions of eulogizing the management or the head of the institution. Experts in the preparation of documents had been consulted. Some had spent much time preparing documents and plans that would impress the peer team. In other words, by trying to please the assessment team, institutions created the semblance of quality rather than effecting quality assurance. This too had led to improvement in quality to some extent. However, the peer team always had a balanced composition of academia that could appreciate the new initiatives of the institutions, and, at the same time, differentiate gloss from reality.

Assessor's perspectives

In order to embrace a holistic understanding of the impact, a questionnaire was developed to ascertain assessors' views regarding the following:

1. what is the perceived quality of NAAC's process and outcomes?
2. does the methodology of NAAC address appropriate issues relevant to quality?
3. how do the chairpersons and members of the peer team perceive the utility of the process?
4. how could the training of chairpersons and members of the peer team be improved?
5. what aspects of the process need to be strengthened?

The questionnaire (*Appendix 8*) constituting the above issues was distributed to 100 assessors (chairpersons and members of the peer team). The principal finding was a strong positive evaluation of many of the features of the process. Most respondents, while suggesting improvements in the process, generally agreed and were satisfied with the current practices of NAAC. On the whole the suggestions centred on:

1. more freedom for institutions to structure the self-study report;
2. increase in the duration of the visit;
3. obtaining more input from society about the institution;
4. responses from parents and students to be more scientific;
5. more involvement of the affiliating university during the assessment visit to the affiliates, as in the case of government colleges where the state governments are involved;
6. developing a follow-up mechanism for the accredited institutions;
7. publicity to be given to the benefits of accreditation;

8. helping institutions develop internal quality-assurance strategies for continuous evaluation;
9. strengthening of assessors' training;
10. establishing minimum norms for each of the five categories of institutional grades;
11. clearly stated benchmarks and focus on outcome;
12. reconsideration of star classification and grading;
13. grading of departments and not the institution as a whole;
14. grading of the criteria and not of the whole institution.

In sum, the analysis of NAAC's impact on the institutions of higher education reveals that external quality assurance as promoted by NAAC through self-study and peer review has resulted in the expected outcomes. The fact that the apex bodies of higher education and the fund-givers take the assessment outcome seriously, has made a lot of difference in the acceptability of NAAC. The instances of boosting the image of the institution in the self-study report, trying to copy others and creating an artificial atmosphere of teamwork and an open climate are minimal and are to be taken as referral points for fine-tuning the process of accreditation. the impact accreditation has on policy-making is still evolving but the trends are very encouraging.

X. LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Conceptualizing a national quality-assurance mechanism and operationalizing the processes for such a vast system with around 12,600 institutions of higher education – 274 universities and 12,600 colleges – that cater to 8 million direct and full-time students with 0.4 million teachers, has been a formidable task. Since its inception in 1994, NAAC had spent three to four years evolving its policies, principles and instruments. Since 1998, approximately 300 institutions have been assessed. Hopefully, the first cycle of assessing and grading the total number of universities that come under the liberal arts and science, general education universities (around 150) will be completed by the end of the year 2002. The number of institutions assessed so far constitutes only a fraction of the target, but the experience gained in evolving an acceptable methodology of EQA for such a complex system and the field experience could be of relevance to nations aspiring to evolve their own quality-assurance mechanisms.

National context and the objective of EQA

The experience of NAAC must be examined under the light of national context and the objectives for which NAAC has been established. It is common sense that the instruments and methods adopted by one country in assessing the quality of higher education may not be totally applicable to another. Even within the same country, one agency may have a different mandate from another because any strategy has to necessarily take cognizance of the contextual conditions. Even successful strategies for achieving a result may not be intrinsically good but depend on a multiplicity of factors

- the task of quality assurance is no exception. Two major aspects that need careful attention are the national context and the objective with which the mechanism is set up.

The EQA system is used the world over either to ascertain the accountability of institutions that function with public support, or to enable institutions to enhance the quality of their educational offerings. NAAC has consciously decided to adopt the latter as its main objective and has evolved its instruments accordingly. Accountability concerns were addressed unobtrusively as an incidental outcome. This conscious decision was based on the fact that in the London model of higher education prevalent in the country, there are adequate checks and balances built in to ensure accountability of institutions. Moreover, India has to go a long way to ensure access and equity to a larger percentage of the population and an overemphasis on accountability may become counter-productive. With this in the background, the lessons learned by NAAC are elaborated in the following pages.

Learning from others

While evolving the instrument and its methodology, NAAC had been guided by the following cardinal principles, through which the experiences of other countries, interpreted in the light of the distinct characteristics of the Indian context, formed the basis:

1. assessment and accreditation need not be an answer to all of the quality concerns in higher education;
2. quality assessment is a complex issue and hence should be used to address issues of high priority;
3. assessment outcome can be useful only for institutions that have the desire to improve and are anxious to do so;
4. assessment should be built on the existing data;
5. it should ensure the acceptance of clientele;

6. quality assessment to a large extent depends on peer judgement and not just on quantitative indicators;
7. the unit of assessment chosen should be viable, feasible and practical in the national context.

In a developing country, there are many factors that affect the quality of education, ranging from financial constraints to sociological contexts. The EQA mechanism cannot possibly address each and every factor and *cannot provide an answer to all of the problems related to the quality of higher education*. Quality assessment is valuable for providing an outcome to be used in the prioritization and decision-making processes of institutions and other stakeholders. At the same time one should realize that quality assessment is a complex issue in itself – it is much more than merely applying predetermined criteria to arrive at simple and straightforward solutions.

EQA can help clarify issues, but is an extravagant way of confirming that 'below average performance is still below average'. Many issues can be resolved simply by giving them attention. There are enough mandatory mechanisms already built in in the Indian system, i.e. annual inspection and reviews, to take care of most of the routine issues. Experiences of other countries indicated that quality assessment as conceived by NAAC is a substantial task and would require a lot of resources and commitment. Such a mechanism should have clear *priorities of a high order*.

It was also clear that any external assessment *could be useful only for those institutions that are committed* to their growth and development. It was realized that it is true for NAAC's process. NAAC was also aware that assessment of quality is meant for those institutions that have a high potential for benefiting from EQA.

The other important assumption NAAC made was that assessment *should be built on existing data* as much as possible. Higher education has always made use of a great amount of data, but it has traditionally been awash in data on aspects like finance, staffing, and student enrolment. In general, these data have been used to justify budgets or obtain more funding and it is obvious that they have rarely been used to improve the quality of higher education. Traditional data such as annual endowment growth, educational and general operating expenditures per student, research income generated, class size, student/faculty ratio, library holdings, student success rate and rate of employment of students might not address directly and explicitly the issue of quality. However, they may contain useful indicators and hence quality assessment should use these existing data without excessive emphasis on documentation and generation of newer data to begin with.

It was also the considered decision that the EQA exercise should be voluntary. An important requirement for the success of performance evaluation of institutions is *to ensure the acceptability of the process*. The academia knows only too well that anything that is imposed on the system will be resisted, if not rejected. If quality assessment is to lead to self-improvement, and if it is to remain an enabling and ameliorative mechanism, it is necessary to convince the system of the merits of EQA and allow institutions to take their own time to get ready for it. Therefore, it was decided that the assessment would be voluntary.

The world over, EQA is a combination of self-studies and peer assessment guided by performance parameters. In the Indian context, NAAC was aware that *quality assessment has largely relied on peer assessment and not just quantitative indicators*. While external quality assessment itself is a new culture that is slowly being nurtured in the

higher education system, overemphasis on performance indicators will defeat the very purpose of assessment. Allowing variance for institutional differences, performance indicators can be used for inter-institutional comparison in certain areas, as well as for purposes of internal management and improvement. Anything more than that, such as teaching output, research income, student progression, etc., should be evaluated with peer judgement, which became clear in all NAAC consultations on quantifying quality.

With these major conceptual clarifications, much more emerged at the practical level when the assessment efforts proceeded.

Lessons of field experience

In the initial stages of the development of the instrument and methodology, NAAC agreed on *rigorous in-house efforts coupled with wider national consultations*. In spite of external quality assessment being a new initiative, sufficient expertise and wisdom could be found outside NAAC. It was agreed that in-depth groundwork should be done by NAAC, which was to be enhanced through the appropriate combination of focus-group workshops and national-level seminars. While the focus groups led to micro-level discussions, national-level consultations broadened the horizons of thinking.

Bringing in people from various backgrounds and interests also helped enhance the insights of the group process. During all discussions, NAAC was cautious not to impose its ideas on the working group, with a view to permitting the emergence of new and open-minded suggestions. In fact, it even helped to avoid any counter-productive effects and allowed the consensus to evolve from the group, which strengthened the feeling among institutions of *ownership of the process*.

Emphasizing the significance of the self-study report as the beginning of quality assessment and insisting on the participatory process also nurtured the feeling of ownership. The internal quality-assurance mechanisms of the institutions were encouraged and involved, which also facilitated to a large extent the participation of the members of the institution in the process. The real benefits of the self-study report have been the impact on *establishing/making the internal quality-assurance mechanism functional and robust*, which strengthened the ownership of QA among the institutions.

While evolving the norms and indicators, NAAC also took into consideration the work already performed by the UGC, the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) and the Association of Indian Universities - which are the national bodies of Indian higher education. By *updating and expanding the statistics already evolved by these agencies*, NAAC could work on its approach. The pilot studies helped fine-tune crude statistics into 'sensitive indicators'.

It was reasonably correct to assume that, at initial stages, there were bound to be mistakes and that field trials and *experimentation might help eliminate the adverse effects of initial errors*. The revision of the grading pattern and the criteria for assessment has led to a few non-comparable outcomes, as in the case of the first batch of 10 institutions. This could have been avoided if the number of pilot studies had been sufficient.

Furthermore, it was found that the *policy of transparency* in all efforts paid rich dividends. Instead of trying to be defensive, NAAC was explicit in reiterating that its process is by and large designed to serve the prime objectives in the first cycle of assessment and may be expanded to include improvements to serve more beneficiaries

during the next cycle. The *transparency and clarity in approach* instilled confidence among the academia.

While working towards the support of the academia, NAAC was aware that it was not possible to expect 100 per-cent acceptance of all its efforts. Whatever the strategy followed, there may always be a minority group to criticize it. The reason need not be based on ignorance or on a lack of conceptual clarity or scepticism, but may be due to genuine concerns. Keeping this in mind, NAAC followed a *multi-pronged approach for information dissemination* on the assessment philosophy and principles. The assurance that was given to the academia about the appropriateness of the process enhanced the acceptance of NAAC's efforts. The large number of academia involved in these activities became the nucleus for clearing the apprehensions of colleagues in their institutions.

Capitalizing on the 'early adopters' (members of the institutions that volunteered for assessment and assessors who joined the assessment visits) was also a great support for the efforts of NAAC. Most of the institutions that volunteered for assessment in the beginning were confident of their potential and were eager to know their strengths and weaknesses through an objective external assessment. Some of them were already employing their own institutional evaluation through internal mechanisms. The broad *involvement of early adopters* who could share their conviction, positive approach and experience enabled NAAC to ensure widespread support from the others. The academia involved in the assessment visits became agents of change in their own institutions. The early adopters have also helped through pilot studies and in the collection of data for working out norms and indicators for assessment.

During NAAC's early studies it was found that instruments and standards that are set should not be followed blindly. They may provide an external point of reference for evaluating the quality of the processes of the institution under assessment, but they cannot be interpreted in void. *Contextualizing, synthesizing and sensitizing the data to objectives* are essential and, for this, peer assessment is inevitable. For example, the student/library-book ratio may be very favourable in an institution. The library may have long working hours, open access system and book-bank facility. If the team judges by those aspects alone, the institution may arrive in the top bracket for library facilities. A closer scrutiny, however, may reveal that over the years, the institution has accumulated books but the quality of the books, currency, implementation of the book-bank facility, support services of the library, linkage with other libraries, and maintenance are all domains that would need to be improved. It is clear that for some of these aspects, quantification in terms of ratio is possible, whereas for others it must be qualitative judgement in terms of good, satisfactory or poor. The peers must synthesize both qualitative and quantitative inferences to arrive at a holistic value judgement, in the context of the institution. In other words, the *peers have an important role* in analyzing and moderating the credits, synthesizing the outcome on individual indicators to arrive at an overall assessment and also in evaluating the contextual framework of the institution. Accepting peer assessment as a vital component, the frame of reference for peer assessment was developed to focus peer attention on key issues that have a direct bearing on criterion assessment.

The objectivity of peer assessment was a major issue of concern. It was addressed appropriately by *evolving safeguards*. Pointers of quality were developed based on the national statistics. *Guiding peer assessment through these pointers of quality* and through the 'frame of reference' has helped it to gain the confidence of the academia.

The role of the EQA agency in the assessment process has also valuable implications. NAAC's role in assessment *per se* is kept minimal and as of now the role of the NAAC officials is to co-ordinate the peer team visits to institutions. The officials remain in the background and do not take part directly in assessment *per se*. The strength of this approach is dependent to a very large extent on the *professionalism of the experts*, especially of the chairperson, and on how well the expert panel functions as a group. This has been ensured to a large extent through the training of the assessors. However, to further ensure the consistency and credibility of the assessment process, NAAC occupies a major role in planning the evaluation framework, development and fine-tuning of instruments and methodology, etc. Thus NAAC does not stop at serving as a mere co-ordinating agency but strikes a *balance between the co-ordinating functions and steering the assessment processes*.

Reporting the assessment in line with the prime tasks of the council and at the same time making it useful to all of the stakeholders is a very critical responsibility. To be specific, the expectations of the students, parents and society might be relatively simple and the information in the web site, the directory of accredited institutions and the assessment reports could very well serve their purpose. However, the report that is to be useful to the government and fund-giving agencies may not be that simple. What kind of report will benefit various stakeholders, what should be of public disclosure, and what information should have privileged access are aspects that must be clearly decided. It is also important to discuss the status of the assessment report. Must recommendations and conclusions be followed to the letter or should the institutions only use them as a source of inspiration and evolve their own strategic plans to promote quality in their offerings? It also has implications for the follow-up procedures. NAAC strengthened these decisions at the very beginning

and it was made clear that in the first cycle of assessment, the primary stakeholder would be the institution. Accordingly, the reporting strategy was confirmed. However, the *expectations of the stakeholders* were taken into consideration while fine-tuning the reporting strategy.

NAAC also realized that *assessment overload should be avoided*. The Indian system has adequate built-in checks and balances to ensure minimum requirements/satisfactory functioning of institutions. In order to avoid assessment overload, as far as possible, assessment activities should be co-ordinated, especially in the case of multi-faculty institutions with professional courses. Consequently, assessment reports of professional bodies are given preference. Nevertheless, the most effective way of avoiding assessment overload, i.e. collaborative assessment, is yet to be established.

Responding positively to the genuine concerns of the academia has been the strength of NAAC. *Fine-tuning the instrument and methodology and roping in government support* towards accreditation costs were the initiatives taken by NAAC in response to the genuine concerns expressed by the institutions of higher education. In fact, when institutions tended to doubt the status of NAAC and wondered whether NAAC would be acting as an arm of the government, NAAC warranted *the independent status* of the council through its awareness programmes.

NAAC respected not only their concerns, but also the *expectations* expressed by institutions. The mid-term review held in June 2000 was a response to analyze the expectations of institutions. After assessing around 125 institutions, NAAC assessed its own evaluation procedures. The *openness and transparency in evaluating the evaluation process* itself, through meta-evaluation, was well-received and it brought the institutions closer to NAAC.

Being in the mainstream of the international trend also augmented the acceptance of NAAC. India did not lag behind other countries in accepting External Quality Assurance as a means to promote quality. There have been many developmental strategies where India joined the mainstream/international trend many decades later, but not in adopting the EQA mechanism. In most countries, except perhaps in the USA, EQA is a concept that evolved very recently and yet India is already in the mainstream. International linkages established with other countries for the purpose of sharing information and experience, teleconferences with international experts, binational conferences, joint research and publication programmes, academic exchange programmes, participation in international events and the presence of international observers and experts in some events organized by NAAC are all initiatives that have enhanced the status of NAAC. Membership in the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the organization of the sixth biennial conference of the INQAAHE network in 2001 at Bangalore have further strengthened NAAC's image.

The lessons learned may be summarized as follows:

- Assessment of quality cannot be the answer to all quality-related problems.
- Quality assessment is a complex issue and hence should be used to address issues of high priority.
- Assessment outcome can be useful only for institutions that have the desire to improve and are anxious to do so.
- Quality assessment to a large extent depends on peer judgement and not just on quantitative indicators.
- For quality assessment, a combination of self-study and peer review offers an appropriate strategy.

- The unit of assessment chosen should be viable, feasible and practical in the national context.
- The feeling of ownership of the process has to be developed among the institutions.
- Emphasizing the significance of the self-study report will make the internal quality-assurance mechanisms functional and robust.
- A combination of focused core-group workshops and broad national-level consultations will ensure the appropriateness of the strategy.
- Bringing in people from various backgrounds to discuss quality issues will enhance the insights of the group process.
- Experimentation and field trials may help eliminate the adverse effects of initial errors.
- Transparency in all the efforts will enhance the acceptability of the strategy.
- A multi-pronged approach is essential to ensure the support of academia.
- Assessment of quality need not rely heavily on quantitative indicators.
- Peer assessment is vital in contextualizing the assessment.
- Clarity in the frame of reference is important to guide peer assessment.
- Guiding peer assessment through pointers of quality and quantitative indicators with caution is rewarding.
- Stakeholder decisions play a vital role in promoting assessment.
- The information requirements of stakeholders and their legitimate expectations should be taken note of.
- Capitalizing on the 'early adopters' will be of great help in promoting the acceptance of the process.
- The role of the EQA agency in steering the assessment processes has to be finalized at the start. The balance between the co-

ordinating functions and steering the assessment processes is an important issue to be finalized before venturing into assessment.

- The reporting of the assessment in line with the prime objectives has to be taken care of.
- The strength of peer assessment depends to a very large extent on the professionalism of the experts and an appropriate training strategy has to be evolved to enhance professionalism.
- The objectivity of peer assessment has to be ensured through appropriate safeguards.
- Assessment overload should be avoided.
- Responding positively to the genuine concerns of the academia will strengthen the acceptance of QA.
- Involving the institutions in fine-tuning the instrument and methodology will be rewarding.
- Mustering government support towards accreditation will enhance the benefits of accreditation.
- The success of the process depends on respecting the expectations of the institutions.
- Being in the mainstream of the international trend will enhance the acceptability of the process at the national level.

XI. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Today, the differences of opinion on NAAC are no longer on 'why there should be assessment of quality', but on 'how it could be done better'. Having overcome the initial resistance in implementing the process, NAAC enjoys acceptance and appreciation from academia. The major stakeholders have taken note of the assessment outcome and given a clear signal that some of their decisions would be linked to the assessment outcome. The stakeholder decisions have already worked as a catalyst to promote assessment and accreditation, and with this positive trend NAAC is entering into a new phase of assessment. In the new phase, NAAC will face many challenges, which need to be addressed through new strategies. These new strategies have to be formulated in the light of global trends as well as the prime objectives with which NAAC has been set up. This chapter highlights some of the thrust areas that are being taken up for discussion with academia, administrators and policy-makers at different levels.

Follow-up on quality assessment

As of now, the responsibility for follow-up in NAAC's process rests almost fully with higher education institutions. Depending on the nature of the recommendations, the government may react on the assessment outcomes, but it is the institutions themselves that are responsible for planning and implementing follow-up measures. However, as more and more systematic decision-making procedures are based on the assessment outcome, and also since the government allocates considerable funds for the implementation of these procedures, the meaningful follow-up that could be initiated has been attained. As given in the MoA, NAAC must "help and encourage

institutions to develop their own procedures, techniques and modalities for self-evaluation". It also has to "ensure an optimized use of resources and the achievement of the identified goals of institutions of higher learning". These two responsibilities argue the need to evolve at least guidelines, if not follow-up procedures, for the further development of institutions that are on the post-assessment scene. This is one of the uncharted areas of NAAC.

Large volume of assessment

Extrapolating the present trend, NAAC anticipates the assessment of a large number of institutions. This has resulted in the need to develop suitable co-coordinating mechanisms to handle a large volume of assessment, for example, assessing about 30 institutions per month on average. As the volume of assessment increases, care should be taken to ensure that the assessment procedure does not fall into the routine of another inspection strategy. The need to maintain the credibility of the process, the robustness of the mechanism and rigour of the exercise has been recognized. The expansion of the council has been found to be inevitable and efforts have already been initiated for strengthening the staff positions. The next stage may involve progressively establishing regional offices. The MoA states that NAAC shall "establish regional branches as and when necessary to ensure the smooth conduct of assessment and accreditation". It is yet to be decided, however, whether NAAC has reached the stage of optimizing the capacity of regional centres, developing the necessary support structure for them and what the implications are for the assessment practices currently in vogue.

Professionalism in quality assessment

Managing a large number of assessment visits requires the induction of a greater number of experts to visit institutions and

recommend the accreditation status to NAAC. As more and more experts from different backgrounds are associated with the process, the mechanism to control the inter-team variance – appropriate protocols and safeguards – needs to be strengthened. One of the proven ways of achieving this is through inducting more assessors, into the process, who are well trained to do the job with a professional touch. The national panel of assessors is being expanded through further training. Likewise, extensive orientation protocols for the identified chairpersons are being fine-tuned.

Fulfilling the expectations of the stakeholders

The stakeholders, who have contributed to the acceptance NAAC enjoys today, have varying expectations and it is important that their legitimate expectations are fulfilled to the greatest extent possible, without compromising the prime objectives of the process. Most of the expectations may be related to 'information requirements' and can be satisfied through an appropriate dissemination of information.

The feedback analysis by NAAC reveals that the institutions themselves have great expectations for NAAC's roles and responsibilities, and especially for resultant incentive and rewards for the accreditation status. However, various issues such as the following are under discussion: 'What is the optimum role? How might NAAC have a meaningful partnership with the accredited institutions? When considering institutions of differing potential and stakeholders of varying expectations, what is the ideal balance that NAAC should strive for?'

In this context, the question of linking financial grants with the accreditation status of institutions was discussed recently with MHRD and it was felt that it would be premature at this stage to link the basic grants to the accreditation status. However, there was a

consensus that institutions that have completed the accreditation process might be given sufficiently attractive recurring annual grants or a one-time ad hoc grant. The amount to be paid under the scheme might be placed at the disposal of the head of the concerned institution, for developmental activities, which might even be part of the NAAC follow-up strategy towards sustenance of quality. NAAC has agreed to suggest a scheme in this regard to be considered by UGC/MHRD.

A proposal on a non-linear link between assessment outcome and incentives - monetary and otherwise - has already been sent to MHRD. It suggests that highly rated institutions may be encouraged with more facilitating policies in new initiatives such as international collaboration, providing education across the national border and special given privileges. For average institutions, the proposal suggests support mechanisms depending on where the weakness lies. It may include monetary support with suitable checks to improve on areas of weakness. All of these discussions are still in the pipeline and it may take some time to see the outcome and the state wise analysis of assessment reports have been initiated for the States of Tamil Nadu and Kerala where more than 15% of the HEIs have been accredited. Expert Committees have been constituted to analyse the reports and identify areas that need further analysis for quality enhancement. It is expected that the committees will submit their reports to NAAC by October 2002 with recommendations for various stakeholders like the UGC, state government and universities, towards improving the quality of HE in the respective states.

Initiating the mandated advisory role

NAAC has the mandate to advise UGC about "measures necessary for determination, maintenance and improvement of teaching and research in higher education institutions." In this context MHRD has

already asked NAAC to provide a state-wise analysis of the status of higher education in each of the states studied by it in order to suggest steps for upgrading quality. The steps to be taken by MHRD and UGC and the linkage between assessment outcome and financial assistance may not be defined as simple or linear, but within the specific context of each case. This would be facilitated by the state-wise analysis of assessment reports and is one of the priority issues of NAAC.

Next cycle of assessment

In many countries, quality-assurance agencies have completed one or more cycles of assessment, and changes have been introduced. The field experience and meta-evaluation of NAAC indicate that similar changes might also have to be introduced in India. In NAAC's methodology, the outcome of assessment is valid for a period of five years. The institutions that have completed three or more years with accredited status are keen to gear up their activities to face the next cycle of assessment. If those institutions are to be assessed what will be the standards and criteria for assessment? Will NAAC follow the same yardstick as in the first cycle, or will the threshold level of grading be pitched higher? Will NAAC bring in any major changes as more and more stakeholders place importance on the assessment outcome? Will there be more emphasis on outcome measures? The subtle difference between re accreditation and next cycle of assessment – how will NAAC take care of it? Issues are being discussed and policy decisions are yet to be taken.

Extending quality assessment to university departments

As the process progresses, a major aspect that needs careful attention in evolving a suitable assessment model is the unit of assessment. Keeping in mind the size of the national system of higher

education, the specific purpose for which assessment has been commissioned, the significance of the outcome to stakeholders, its viability and feasibility, NAAC focused on institutional accreditation in the first phase. Today, there is a growing demand for departmental accreditation, mostly from performing departments. NAAC has finalized the instrument and methodology for departmental accreditation. However, benchmarking and indicators are yet to be developed and piloted. To begin with, seven realms of study – physics, chemistry, life sciences, management, English, economics, and international studies – have been taken up for discussion. This effort will be the focus in the coming years.

Avoiding assessment overload

The Indian system of higher education has many built-in checks and balances to ensure minimum requirements/satisfactory functioning of institutions and programmes. The assessment by NAAC, to some extent, could thus be made complementary and not overlapping. As far as possible, assessment and inspection activities can be co-ordinated in order to avoid an assessment overload. If too many assessment activities are carried out there is a risk that the resources will be focused on the assessment to follow – the prioritization of the follow-up may also be confusing and the final outcome counter-productive. The implication is that more emphasis has to be laid on the planning and co-ordination of assessment activities. Redundant inspection activities should be avoided and arrangements should be made with professional bodies for collaborative assessment.

Collaborative assessment

NAAC has already convened two meetings with the heads of professional bodies on the issue of collaborative assessment. To

assess open universities and distance education units of other universities, NAAC and the distance education council have collaboratively developed a manual. The National Council for Teacher Education has developed a draft manual for accrediting teacher education institutions in collaboration with NAAC and discussions are going on to fine-tune it. Other professional bodies like the Medical Council of India are also interested in collaborating with NAAC. The sharing of responsibilities in planning and conducting the visit, reporting the assessment outcome, handling contentious issues, determining and sharing the assessment fee are the issues that need to be discussed. The MoU that covers these issues must be strengthened.

Evolving a national qualifications framework

The complexity and diversity of the Indian higher education system has resulted in considerable variance of the quality of educational offerings. There is a need to develop a national framework of educational qualifications for tertiary education (National Qualifications Framework in Higher Education-NQFHE) with a sufficient and precise description of the purpose, content, duration and level in a generic way. The task of developing and implementing the qualifications framework has been entrusted to UGC, the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration and NAAC. NAAC will play an active role in this task.

Strengthening the dialogue with quality-assurance agencies of other countries

The assessment procedures are by no means static. They are constantly being improved and influenced by experiences from other countries or through the dialogue with other quality-assurance

agencies on good practices of assessment. The need for the exchange of information and experience has definitely increased. There are also examples of more organized forms of co-operation such as INQAAHE. There is a need to strengthen NAAC's dialogue with them.

Involving other stakeholders in the peer team

While assessing general and professional educational institutions and their units, there has been a suggestion that the peer team should have representatives from the private sector, from industry and of other stakeholders. The assessment procedure primarily involves higher education institutions, NAAC and experts responsible for the on-site visit and peer assessment. Involving other stakeholders in the assessment process might have to be considered in the future. In the context of internationalization of education, quality-assurance agencies of other countries are also to be considered as stakeholders. They have a stake in the process of recognition of the qualifications or other educational or assessment outcome across national borders. In fact, for mutual recognition of qualifications, there is a stipulation that the assessment process should be open and transparent and that a provision should exist to invite representatives from the quality-assurance agencies of other countries to observe the process of assessment on a reciprocal basis. The protocol for recognizing the quality assurance of technical education as evolved by the Washington Accord includes this provision. INQAAHE is also evolving similar norms. However, NAAC is yet to take a policy decision on this issue. This issue may be discussed and a few visits involving quality-assurance agencies of other countries may be conducted in the near future.

Mutual recognition among quality-assurance agencies

Quality-assurance agencies of different countries are discussing binational and multinational accords for recognizing each other's assessment outcomes. This was discussed in the INQAAHE-2001 conference on 'Quality assurance in higher education: Quality, standards and recognition', that was hosted by NAAC. There were also regional meetings during the conference at which this issue was discussed at various regional levels. Regional networks have been established, and NAAC is a member of the Asia-Pacific regional network. In fact, Professor A. Gnanam, chairperson of the EC and other committees of NAAC, is co-chairperson of the Asia-Pacific network with Dr Wang Wai Sum as chairperson. The norms for entering into such mutual recognition arrangements are under consideration. The standardization and development of quality indicators in line with the international trend, exchange of information with other countries, joining international accreditation initiatives and pooling of quality-assurance expertise at national and regional levels of the world will be given a thrust in this context.

Strengthening research on quality assessment

The world over, quality assurance through external review is of recent origin. The theoretical basis of quality assurance is fast developing and core issues that are likely to affect the processes for the next decade have been identified as finance, frameworks and flexibility. New paradigms are emerging in relation to the panel visit, assessing a 'virtual university', quality of on-line education, international quality-assurance initiatives, mutual recognition of national agencies and international benchmarking. NAAC must contribute to these efforts at the international level, and may also focus on research and development in issues such as reporting the outcome, further fine-tuning the instrument and methodology,

analyzing the impact of assessment and accreditation on educational administration and management, institutional response to quality assurance, stakeholder perceptions, case studies and benchmarking, within the national context. Establishing a research cell within NAAC to focus on these research areas is under consideration.

Both challenging and academically rewarding tasks lie ahead. Aware of the challenges, NAAC has chalked out a draft plan of action, and discussions are under way regarding both this and its vision document.

CONCLUSION

It may not be possible to identify a single set of policies and strategies of the Indian system as the best set of practices for quality assurance. However, educational institutions being similar in many ways, most of the issues of quality assurance have common roots; hence for a given frame of reference, we can always identify the practices that would be more successful and meaningful. This case study is expected to contribute to an understanding of one of the paths taken in the journey towards quality enhancement in higher education.

In quality-assurance systems worldwide, this question is still an issue of quality assurance: 'Is there a better way of doing things?' The Indian experience, which is dynamic and rich, but still evolving, is sure to throw more light on some of those issues.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Format for self-study

I. Profile of the university

1. Name and address of the university:

2. For communication:

Office

Name	Region code	Tel. No.	Ext. No.
Vice-Chancellor			
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (s)			
Registrar			
Steering Committee			
Co-ordinator			

Fax No.:

E-mail :

Residence

	Region code	Tel. No.(s)
Vice-Chancellor		
Pro-Vice-Chancellor		
Registrar		
Steering Committee		
Co-ordinator		

Fax No.:

E-mail:

3. Status of the university:

State university	☐
Central university	☐
Deemed to be university	☐
Any other (specify)	

4. Type of university:

Unitary	☐
Affiliating	☐

5. Date of establishment of the university:

Month and year
(mm-yyyy)

(a) Original (prior to establishment as a university) :

(b) As a university :

6. Date of UGC recognition as university:

Month and year (mm-yyyy)

(a) Under 2f

(b) Under 12B

(c) As a deemed university

(d) Any other (specify)

7. Does the university have a satellite campus?

Yes ☐ No ☐

8. Campus area in acres:

(a) Main campus area

(b) Satellite campus area

9. Location of the university:

- Urban ☐
- Semi-urban ☐
- Rural ☐
- Any other (specify)

10. Name the various statutory bodies of the institution and give the details of their composition. (Details may be enclosed)

11. Give the list of officers at the Registrar level and above.

12. Furnish the following:

Particulars	Number
University departments	
Affiliated colleges - Government funded	
- Self-financing	
Constituent colleges	
Autonomous colleges	
Postgraduate teaching centres	
Recognized research institutes/centres	

13. Current number of academic programmes offered within the university under the following categories: (Enclose the list of academic programmes offered)

Programmes	Number
Certificate course	
Diploma	
UG	
PG Diploma	
PG	
M.Phil.	
Ph.D.	
Post Doctoral fellowship	
Any other (specify)	
Total	

14. Give details of the self-financing courses offered by the institution:

Programme	Level of study	Cut off marks at entry level in %	Student strength

15. State the norms and procedures for recruitment of teaching and non-teaching staff of the university. (Details may be enclosed)

16. Number of permanent and temporary members of the teaching staff at present:

	Female	Male	Total
Permanent teachers (total)			
No. of teachers with Ph.D. as the highest qualification			
No. of teachers with M.Phil. as the highest qualification			
No. of teachers with PG as the highest qualification			
Temporary teachers (total)			

No. of teachers with Ph.D. as the highest qualification			
No. of teachers with M.Phil. as the highest qualification			
No. of teachers with PG as the highest qualification			
Part-time teachers (total)			
Part-time teachers with Ph.D. as the highest qualification			
Part-time teachers with M.Phil. as the highest qualification			
Part-time teachers with PG as the highest qualification			

17. Number of members of the non-teaching staff of the university at present:

	Female	Male	Total
Administrative staff			
Technical staff			

18. Number of students enrolled in the university for the current academic year according to regions and countries:

UG	Female	Male	Total
No. of students from the same state where the university is located			
No. of students from other states			
No. of NRI students			
No. of overseas students			

PG	Female	Male	Total
No. of students from the same state where the university is located			
No. of students from other states			
No. of NRI students			
No. of overseas students			
Grand total (UG + PG)			

M. Phil.	Female	Male	Total
No. of students from the same state where the university is located			
No. of students from other states			
No. of NRI students			
No. of overseas students			

Ph.D.	Female	Male	Total
No. of students from the same state where the university is located			
No. of students from other states			
No. of NRI students			
No. of overseas students			
Grand total (M. Phil. + Ph.D.)			

Diploma/Certificate	Female	Male	Total
No. of students from the same state where the university is located			
No. of students from other states			
No. of NRI students			
No. of overseas students			

Post-doctoral	Female	Male	Total
No. of students from the same state where the university is located			
No. of students from other states			
No. of NRI students			
No. of overseas students			
Grand total (Diploma / Certificate + Post-Doctoral)			

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Self-financing courses	Female	Male	Total
No. of students from the same state where the university is located			
No. of students from other states			
No. of NRI students			
No. of overseas students			
Grand total			

19. Details of the last two batches of students:

	Batch 1			Batch 2		
	Year of entry			Year of entry		
	UG	PG	Total	UG	PG	Total
Admitted to the programme (entry year)						
Drop-outs						
• Within four months of joining						
• Afterwards						
Appeared for the final-year examination						
Passed in the final examination						
Passed in first class						
Ranks, if any						

20. Give a copy of the last annual budget of the university with details of plan and non-plan revenue/expenditure. (Attach separately)

21. What is the university's 'unit cost' of education? [unit cost = total annual expenditure budget (actuals) divided by the number of students enrolled]

22. What is the temporal plan of academic work in the university?

Semester system

☐

Annual system

☐

Any other (specify)

23. Is the credit system of instruction followed?

Yes ☐

No ☐

24. Tick the support services available in the university from the following:

Central library

☐

Computer centre

☐

Health centre

☐

Sports facilities

☐

Press

☐

Workshop

☐

Hostels

☐

Guest house

☐

Housing

☐

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Canteen | ☐ |
| Welfare schemes | ☐ |
| Grievance redressal cell | ☐ |
| Vehicle parking shed | ☐ |
| Non-resident centre | ☐ |
| Any other (specify) | ☐ |

25. Does the institution offer a distance education programme?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, indicate the number of courses offered and the number of full-time faculty employed.

26. How is the distance education programme organized?

27. How many students have passed the following examinations in the last five years?

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| UGC - CSIR examination (NET) | <input type="text"/> |
| GATE | <input type="text"/> |
| Indian Civil Services Examinations | <input type="text"/> |
| GRE | <input type="text"/> |
| TOEFL | <input type="text"/> |
| GMAT | <input type="text"/> |
| Any other (specify) | |
| <input type="text"/> | <input type="text"/> |

28. How many students who cleared UGC-CSIR / GATE have registered in the university?

232

29. Furnish the following details (in figures) for the last three years:

- Working days of the university
- Working days of the library
- Teaching days of the university
- Books in the library
- Journals/periodicals subscribed to by the library:
 - National
 - International
- Computers in the university
- Research projects completed and their total outlay
- Teachers who have received national recognition for teaching/research/consultancy
- Teachers who have received international recognition for teaching/research/consultancy
- Teachers who have attended international seminars
- Teachers who were resource persons at national seminars/workshops

30. Give the number of ongoing research projects and their total outlay.

31. Does the university have collaborations/linkages with international institutions?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, list the MoUs signed and furnish the important details of those collaborations.

II. Affiliating functions of the university

1. What is the total number of institutions affiliated to the university?

Liberal Arts and Science:

Professional :

Law

Medicine

Engineering

Education

Management

Others

2. What are the norms to extend affiliation to a new institution?

Arts and Science Colleges

Professional Institutions:

Law

Medicine

Engineering

Education

Management

Others

3. What is the procedure adopted to extend additional programmes of studies to affiliated institutions?

4. Does the university extend recognition to national institutions that provide research training leading to research degrees?

Yes

☐

No

☐

If yes, give details.

5. By which mechanism are the developmental needs of the affiliated institutions co-ordinated and met?

6. How often is the functioning of the affiliated institutions inspected and supervised? When was that exercise done last?

7. Does the university maintain constituent college(s) in the campus?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, give details.

8. How often is the curriculum pertaining to the affiliated institutions updated and diversified?

9. Give the inventory of programmes offered by the university for the colleges to choose from.

10. Does the university have provision to grant autonomous status to the affiliated institutions?

Yes ☐ No ☐

11. Furnish data about the number of students enrolled in the **affiliated institutions** for the current year with the following details:

UG	Female	Male	Total
Students from the same state where the university is located			
Students from other states of India			
NRI students			
Other overseas students			
Grand total			

PG	Female	Male	Total
Students from the same state where the university is located			
Students from other states of India			
NRI students			
Other overseas students			
Grand total (UG + PG)			

12. Furnish data about the number of students in **affiliated institutions** for the current year with the following details:

M. Phil.	Female	Male	Total
No. of students from the same state where the university is located			
No. of students from other states			
No. of NRI students			
No. of overseas students			
Ph. D.			
No. of students from the same state where the university is located			
No. of students from other states			
No. of NRI students			
No. of overseas students			
Grand total (M.Phil. + Ph.D.)			

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Diploma/Certificate	Female	Male	Total
No. of students from the same state where the university is located			
No. of students from other states			
No. of NRI students			
No. of overseas students			
Post-doctoral	Female	Male	Total
No. of students from the same state where the university is located			
No. of students from other states			
No. of NRI students			
Grand total (Diploma Certificate + Post-doctoral.)			

13. Have there been efforts to restructure the UG courses to make them socially relevant and/or job oriented?

14. By which mechanism, if any, do the institutions affiliated to the university give feedback and interact?

15. What is the scheme/system of examination in practice for the affiliated institutions?

16. How long has the current system of evaluation been in practice?

17. Give details of the number of question papers set, examinations conducted per year.

18. What methods of evaluation of answer scripts does the university follow?

19. Mention the number of malpractice cases reported and how they are dealt with.

20. Does the university provide for re-valuation of student answer scripts?

21. Has the examination system been computerized?

Yes ☐ No ☐

22. Does the university have a College Development Council (CDC)?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, give the details of its structure and functions.

23. Does the university have an Academic Staff College? If yes, give the details of courses it offers.

III. Criterion-wise inputs

Criterion I: Curricular aspects

1. What is the range of programme options available to the students for awards such as degrees, certificates and diplomas?

2. To what extent are the programme options career oriented?

3. Are programmes flexible enough to offer students the following benefits?

(a) Time-frame matching student convenience

(b) Horizontal mobility

(c) Elective options

(d) Non-core options

4. How often are the existing curricula for a subject reviewed and updated?

5. What is the mechanism used for formulating the curricular content of new programmes?

(a) Regular Boards of Studies

(b) Expert committees

(c) National curricular sources

(d) Any other (specify)

6. How long does it take to introduce a new programme of study after it has been conceptualized?

7. What percentage of the members of the Boards of Studies, or other such academic committees, is external? Enclose the guidelines for BOS.

8. Are there other strategies to review academic programmes besides the Academic Council?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, how often are such reviews made?

9. To what extent are laboratory work, fieldwork and projects incorporated in each of the programmes of study?

10. How are institutional mission and goals, if any (other than the transmission and generation of knowledge), reflected in the curricula?

11. Furnish details of the following aspects of curriculum design:

(a) innovation such as modular curricula;

(b) inter/multidisciplinary approach;

(c) inter-institutional.

12. Any other highlights.

Criterion II: Teaching-learning and evaluation

1. What percentage of the total budget is allocated to the academic programmes?

2. How are students selected for admission into various courses?

- (a) Through special entrance tests ☐
(b) Through interviews ☐
(c) Through their academic record ☐
(d) Through combination of the above ☐

3. Are there departmental libraries for the use of faculty and students?

All ☐ Few ☐ None ☐

4. Apart from classroom instruction, what are the other avenues of learning provided for the students? (projects, internships, field trainings, seminars)

5. Are there bridge courses for students who come from different streams to study interdisciplinary courses?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, give details.

6. Furnish the following: (last two years)

- Number of working days of the university
- Number of teaching days of the university
- Ratio of full-time teachers to part-time teachers
- Ratio of teaching staff to non-teaching staff
- % of classes taught by full-time faculty

7. What type of evaluation method is currently being followed? How long has it been in practice?

8. During the last decade, how many times has the method of evaluation been changed?

9. How are the question papers set to ensure the achievement of the course objectives?

10. What guidelines are adopted in choosing the question-paper setters and the examiners?

11. What is the method of valuation followed?

- Central valuation ☐
- Door valuation ☐

12. What are the practices of the institution regarding the following?

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| (a) Double valuation | <input type="text"/> |
| (b) Moderation and adjustment of the pass/fail ratio | <input type="text"/> |
| (c) Re-valuation | <input type="text"/> |
| (d) Re-totalling | <input type="text"/> |

13. Is the institution known for its regularity in conducting examinations and announcing results? Substantiate

14. How many of the academic faculty have at least a one-step higher qualification than the mandatory minimal level?

15. Provide the following information about the teaching staff recruited during the last two years:

	Year	Same state	Other states
	Same institution	Other institution	
Year before			
Year before last			

16. How do the faculty keep abreast with recent developments in their subject area?

17. Give the number of teachers who have attended seminars/conferences/workshops as participants/resource persons in the last two years.

Year	Participant	Resource person
Year before		
Year before last		

18. How are the faculty inducted in the use of computers, information technology and such support services?

19. Does the institution follow self-appraisal methods to evaluate teachers on teaching, research and work satisfaction?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, how is the self-appraisal of teachers analyzed and used?

20. Does the institution have a mechanism other than self-appraisal to evaluate teachers on teaching, research and work satisfaction? (Peers, Students)

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, how is it used?

21. Give details of a few faculty development programmes and the number of faculty who have benefited from them, during the last two years:

Year	Number of beneficiaries	
	Programmes organized by the institution	Programmes organized by other agencies
Year before		
Year before last		

22. Indicate the number of faculty who have taken study leave and sabbatical leave during the last two years:

Year	Study leave	Sabbatical leave
Year before		
Year before last		

23. What are the national and international linkages established for teaching?

24. What are the teaching awards won by the faculty?

25. Any other highlights.

Criterion III: Research, consultancy and extension

1. What percentage of the faculty are actively involved in research? (Guiding M.Phil. and Ph.D., scholars, operating projects, publishing regularly etc.)

2. Give details of the ongoing research projects.

3. What are the major research facilities developed and available in the campus?

4. How well endowed is the central library for reference books and speciality journals?

5. What is the total number of research students currently registered for Ph.D.?

- Full-time
- Part-time

6. How many of the full-time research scholars have fellowships/scholarships such as JRF?

7. How many Post-doctoral fellows are currently working in the institution?

8. How many of them have the Ph.D. degree of other institutions?

9. Is there a separate research committee to facilitate and monitor research?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, give details.

10. Furnish the following: (last three/five years)

- Research papers published at international and national levels by the faculty
- Number of inventions and patents
- Number of books published

- Number of Ph.D.s awarded
- Awards/recognition for research work received

11. Does the institution publicize the expertise available for consultancy services?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, give details of areas of expertise, channels of publicizing, and the kind of response received.

12. List the broad areas of consultancy services provided by the university during the last three years.

13. Give particulars of the finance generated through consultancy services by the faculty.

14. Does the institution have a designated person for extension activities?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, indicate the nature of the post.

Full-time ☐

Part-time ☐

15. How does the institution organize the extension activities?

16. Any other highlights.

Criterion IV: Infrastructure and learning resources

1. Enclose the master plan of the university campus indicating the existing buildings and the projected expansion in the future.

2. How does the institution plan to meet the need for augmenting the infrastructure to keep pace with academic growth?

3. How does the institution ensure maintenance of its infrastructure?

4. How does the institution ensure optimum use of its infrastructure facilities?

5. Give the following details of the library:

- Advisory committee
- Inter-library exchange
- Book bank facility
- Computerization of the library services
- Books in the library
- Journals subscribed to:

National

International

- Ratio of library books to number of students enrolled

6. Give the number of books/journals/periodicals that have been added to the central library during the last two years and their cost:

Year	Books		Journals		Periodicals	
	Number	Rs.'000	Number	Rs.'000	Number	Rs.'000
Year before						
Year before last						

7. Does the library provide the following facilities to the students:

- reprographic facilities ☐
- computers ☐
- audio/video cassettes ☐
- Internet ☐
- any other (specify)

8. If there is a central computer facility, give the following details:

- configuration and other hardware and software details
- working hours
- training for university personnel
- output in developing computer aided learning packages and software for administration / accounts etc.
- maintenance of the computer centre

9. If the institution has a health centre, give details of the staff structure, and of the facilities available there.

10. Are the following health-care facilities offered?

	Students	Teachers	Staff
Compulsory general medical check-up	☐	☐	☐
Maintenance of health records	☐	☐	☐
Compulsory health insurance	☐	☐	☐

11. What are the physical and infrastructure facilities available in the sports and physical education centre?

☐

12. What are the incentives given to students, proficient in sports?

☐

13. Give details of the participation of students and the outcome, at the state, regional, national and international levels, during the last year:

	No. of students participated	Outcome
State level	☐	☐
Regional level	☐	☐
National level	☐	☐
International level	☐	☐

14. What are the physical and infrastructure facilities available in the workshop/ instrumentation centre?

☐

15. What are the different welfare programmes of the institution?
What are the procedural details and criteria for faculty and staff to avail themselves of loan facilities?

16. Give details of the hostel facilities available in the campus.

17. Give details of the grievance redressal mechanism of the institution.

18. Any other highlights.

Criterion V: Student support and progression

1. Furnish the following details:

- spread of students w.r.t. locale

	Number of students
Same state	
Other states	
NRI	
Overseas	

- Pass % after the minimum period of study

- Drop-out rate

2. Does the institution collect feedback from students regularly?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what was the major feedback from students of last year?

How was it used?

3. Does the institution publish its updated prospectus annually?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what are the contents of the prospectus?

4. Do the students get the benefit of academic and career counselling?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, give details.

5. What kind of financial aids are available to students from central government, state government, the institution and others?

6. Mention the number of students who have received financial aid during the last two years:

Year	Number of beneficiaries
Year before	
Year before last	

7. Does the institution have an employment cell and a placement officer who offers career-counselling services to students?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, describe their roles.

8. To what extent do faculty participate in academic and personal counselling?

9. How many students were employed through placement services during the last year?

10. Does the employment cell encourage students to be self-employed?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, how many are self-employed?

11. Does the institution have an Alumni Association?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, indicate the activities of the Alumni Association.

12. How are the prospective students informed clearly about the criteria for admission, rules and regulations, facilities available, etc?

13. What is the admission policy of the institution with regard to overseas students?

14. State the support services given to overseas students:

- One window admission service ☐
- Foreign students office ☐
- Special accommodation ☐
- Induction courses ☐
- Sociocultural activities ☐
- Welfare programme ☐
- Any other (specify)

15. What are the recreational / leisure time facilities available to students in the campus?

16. Any other highlights.

Criterion VI: Organization and management

1. Give the organizational structure, and the details of the units (planning board, academic council, etc.) along with their functions in key words.

2. What are the powers and responsibilities of the officers of the institution?

3. What efforts were taken by the institution to improve the functioning of organization and management? Give details.

4. How many cases of violation of code of conduct were recorded during the last three years? Give details.

5. How is the academic calendar prepared each year? How does the administration ensure the regular implementation of the academic calendar?

6. How does the institution ensure the implementation of the reservation policy?

7. Does the institution maintain confidential reports of the administrative staff?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, how are the reports analyzed and used?

8. What are the initiatives taken by the institution for administrative staff development programmes?

9. Furnish the number of administrative staff who have attended administrative training programmes during the last two years:

	No. of beneficiaries
Year before	
Year before last	

10. What resources were generated by the institution in the last year through the following sources?

- Donations
- Fund-raising drives
- Alumni Association
- Consultancy

- Self-financing courses
- State government grants
- Central government grants
- Any other (specify)

11. What is the current tuition and other fee?

Programme

Tuition

Library

Laboratory

Hostel

Mess

Others (specify)

What is the basis for fixing the same?

12. If there were changes in the tuition and other fees during the last three years, give details.

13. Furnish the amount spent under the various heads of expenditure last year.

Head of expenditure	Budget provided	Amount spent in Rs.

14. How much grant (state and central) has lapsed during the last two years? What are the reasons?

15. Is there an internal audit mechanism?

Yes ☐ No ☐

16. How many objections have been raised by the external auditors in the last year's audit? What is the total amount involved in the objections?

17. Any other highlights.

Criterion VII: Other healthy practices

1. Has the institution adopted any mechanism/process for internal quality checks?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, give details.

2. Is the institution sensitized to latest managerial concepts such as strategic planning, teamwork, decision-making and computerization?

Yes ☐ No ☐

3. Does the institution have:

- Twinning programmes ☐
- MoUs with ☐
- industries ☐
- research organizations ☐
- student exchange programme ☐

4. What are the other international linkages established by the institution for training and research?

5. How does the institution strengthen the regular academic programmes through other complementary systems like self-financing courses, non-formal mode and distance education?

6. What are the practices of the institution to impart value-based education?

7. How does the institution inculcate civic responsibilities among the students?

8. What are the institutional efforts towards allround personality development of the learners?

9. How is the institution geared to achieve its specific goals and objectives?

10. What are the institutional efforts to bring in 'community orientation' in its activities?

11. Indicate the efforts to promote general/transferable skills among the students such as:

- Capacity to learn
- Communication skills
- Numerical skills
- Use of information technology
- Work as part of a team and independently

12. Any other institution-specific innovations which have contributed to its growth.

Inputs from the departments

1. Name and address of the department:

2. Telephone number/s:

3. Indicate the date of establishment of the department:

4. The built up area of the department in square metres:

5. Name of the HOD:

6. List the different **programmes** (Level of study = Certificate/ Diploma/UG/PG Diploma/PG/M.Phil./Ph.D./Post-doctoral etc) offered by the department, together with the details required below:

Programme	Level of study	Cut-off marks at entry, in %	Student strength

7. Mention the number of teaching and non-teaching staff of the department:

	Male	Female	Total
No. of teachers with Ph.D. as the highest qualification			
No. of teachers with M.Phil. as the highest qualification			
No. of part-time teachers			
No. of administrative staff			
No. of technical staff			
No. of class IV staff			

8. Does the department have academic, administrative and financial autonomy?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, to what extent?

	No	Yes	Full	Partial
Academic matters	☐	☐	☐	☐
Administration	☐	☐	☐	☐
Finance	☐	☐	☐	☐

9. Furnish the following data about the number of students in the department during the current year:

	Female	Male	Total
Students from the same state where the department is located			
Students from other states of India			
NRI students			
Other overseas students			

10. Is there a method of assessing the students' academic standing in order to provide enrichment and/or remedial courses?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, give details.

11. Furnish the following details (**in figures**) about the department:

- Books in the department library
- Journals/periodicals subscribed to by the department
- Computers in the department
- Ongoing research projects and their total outlay
- Research projects completed during the last three years and their total outlay
- Teachers who have attended national seminars during the last three years
- Teachers who have attended international seminars during the last three years

12. Details of the last two batches of students:

	Batch 1			Batch 2		
	Year of entry			Year of entry		
	UG	PG	Total	UG	PG	Total
Admitted to the programme (entry year)						
Drop-outs Within four months of joining Afterwards						
Appeared for the final-year examination						
Passed in the final examination						
Passed in I class						
University ranks, if any						

13. What is the sanctioned faculty strength and the present position?

Sanctioned: Filled:

14. How often were national/international seminars and workshops organized at the department? List the seminars and workshops organized during the last three years.

15. Are there any international or national links/collaborations for promoting teaching, research or both?

16. List the faculty with their designations, highest qualification, fields of specialization, years of experience, age and sex, in the descending order of seniority:

[illegible]

17. How many of the faculty have received national/international recognition as fellows, awardees etc.?

18. What percentage of the faculty are actively involved in research (guiding research scholars, operating projects, publishing regularly etc.)?

19. List the major thrust areas within the subject in which research activities are being actively pursued.

20. Give details of ongoing projects funded by external agencies:

Funding agency	Amount (Rs.)	Duration (years)	Collaboration if any

21. What are the basic and advanced facilities (like botanical garden, field laboratories, animal house, computing facility, major equipment like NMR etc) brought up over the years?

22. What are the criteria and procedures followed for selecting research scholars?

23. How many of them have passed the UGC-CSIR exam(NET)/GRE and other competitive examinations?

24. (a) Are there any post-doctoral fellows working presently? How many of them are from other laboratories?

- (b) How are they supported?

25. What percentage of research scholars have obtained their master's degrees from other institutions?

26. How many of the senior research scholars and post-doctoral fellows are involved in teaching and in conducting practical classes?

27. What is the total number of publications of the department in the last five years? How many of them were published/presented in international journals/forums? (Add list).

28. Which academic body helps in the formulation and implementation of new academic programmes?

29. How often were the curricula of these programmes reviewed and revised?

30. Was any teaching programme dropped because it had lost its immediate relevance or because it was not viable?

31. What is the average workload of each teacher in terms of actual contact lectures per week?

32. Are there different student/teacher ratios for lecture and laboratory courses?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, give the details.

33. What are the alternative provisions made for practical training in those areas of study that do not require formal laboratory facilities?

34. What is the average time spent by a teacher with students (other than research scholars)? Indicate the extent of time spent by each faculty in counselling and advising the students.

35. How many of them participate in academic committees of the department and of the university?

36. How is student work evaluated? Is it fully internal or fully external or both?

37. How do teachers update their classroom instruction/research?

38. What is the annual budget allocation of the university to the department?

39. How much of research funding has been generated by the teachers from other agencies?

40. Do the teachers offer consultancy services and earn revenue for the university/ department?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If yes, how much has been earned during the last two years?

41. Does the department publicize the expertise available?

42. Does the department practise the principle of 'Rotational Headship'?

Yes ☐

No ☐

43. Furnish the following details:

Particulars	UG	PG	Research
Ratio of applications to available seats			
Success rate (examination results)			
Progression to higher education rate			
Employment rate			
Ratio of full-time teachers to part-time teachers			
Ratio of academic staff to administrative staff			
Requests for re-valuation to students who took the examinations			

44. Furnish the following data:

- Ratio of students to teachers
- Ratio of research scholars to teachers (eligible to guide research students)
- Ratio of research papers published during the last three years at international and national levels to number of teachers
- Number of Ph.D. theses guided during the last two years
- Number of inventions or patents

45. Has the department been recognized for any special status such as CAS, DSA or DRS of UGC?

46. Has the department been participating in COSIP/COHSSIP/SAP/COSIST?

☐

47. Any other highlights.

☐

Appendix 2. Agenda for interactions

Interaction with management committee

The main purpose of this meeting, to be held at the beginning of the visit to the institution, is to help the team understand the institution and have an idea of how it is performing vis-à-vis institutions of similar type in the state. The specific agenda is as follows:

- goals and objectives;
- translation of goals and objectives into programmes;
- filling of vacancies;
- grievance redressal mechanism;
- welfare programmes;
- future plans of the college;
- plans to generate resources.

Agenda for interaction with the head of the institution

- modifications in curriculum: past, present and future;
- translation of goals and objectives into programmes;
- mechanism of the college for initiating new programmes and for modifying those already in place;
- policy on continuous internal assessment;
- training technical staff;
- appointment of faculty and faculty performance appraisal;
- faculty development programme;
- facilitating faculty research and consultancy;
- facilitating extension activities;
- encouraging student and staff participation;
- confidential report and work efficiency charts;
- grievance redressal mechanism and welfare programmes.

Agenda for interaction with faculty

- modifications in curriculum;
- teaching-learning methods;
- student feedback;
- faculty evaluation through self-evaluation;
- faculty development programme;
- awards/recognition/incentives;
- access to computer centre;
- grievance redressal mechanism and welfare programmes;
- research facility and promotion.

Agenda for interaction with students

- reason for choosing course/institution;
- match between curriculum and expectations (flexibility, choice, content);
- appropriateness of the curricular content to the development of knowledge and skills;
- relevance to prospective career/further study;
- student timetable and workload;
- opportunities for practical and vocational experience, where appropriate;
- range of teaching and learning methods experienced;
- students' views on quality of teaching;
- guidance and support for independent study;
- students' understanding of assessment methods and criteria;
- feedback on assessed work;
- access to computer centre;
- health services and sports and physical education;
- hostels and canteen facilities;
- grievance redressal mechanism;
- financial aid, academic and personal counselling.

Agenda for interaction with staff

- staff development programmes;
- staff view of the value of their contribution to the institution;
- relationship with faculty;
- user-friendly approach towards students;
- staff welfare programmes;
- grievance redressal mechanism;
- staff training and development facility (training programme, refresher courses, etc.).

Agenda for interaction with parents

- general impression about the college;
- specific reason for selecting this college;
- the nature and frequency of interaction with the college authorities/principal;
- facilities for overall development of wards;
- employment/higher education need/plan for their wards.

Agenda for interaction with alumni

- competences developed at the institution;
- alumni/alumnae prominent positions;
- alumni/alumnae meetings – nature and outcome;
- suggestions for active functioning of the alumni association;
- suggestions for the improvement of the institution and areas in which they can contribute.

Appendix 3. Parameters and criterion statements

Parameter I: Institutional goals and objectives

- The goals and objectives of the institution are clearly stated, periodically reviewed, and communicated systematically to all its constituencies.
- The goals and objectives of the institution reflect contemporary educational needs and are relevant to regional/national/international demands.

Parameter II: Curriculum design and review

- The programmes of teaching and learning are consistent with the goals and objectives of the institution.
- The process of programme approval is well organized.
- Feedback from academic peers and employers is used in the initiation, review and redesign of programmes.

Parameter III: Teaching, learning and evaluation

- Programmes of teaching and learning take into account individual differences among learners and offer academic flexibility.
- The institution facilitates the effective running of teaching/learning programmes.
- The evaluation procedures in the educational programmes are rigorous and fair.
- Regularity and confidentiality of examinations are maintained.
- The institution has an efficient mechanism to recruit qualified and adequate faculty.
- The institution has an open and participative mechanism for evaluation of teaching, research and work satisfaction of the faculty.

- Faculty has the opportunity for continued academic progress and professional advancement.

Parameter IV: Research and publications

- The institution promotes research culture among faculty and students.
- The institution has a vigorous and well-scrutinized publication programme and actively encourages faculty and students to publish in academic forums.

Parameter V: Consultancy and extension activities

- The institution promotes faculty participation in consultancy services.
- The institution is responsive to community needs and conducts relevant extension and awareness programmes.

Parameter VI: Organization and management

- The organization of the institution is such that powers and responsibilities are clearly assigned to designated bodies and individuals to facilitate tasks that are related to every aspect of the goals of the institution and to every segment of its constituencies.
- The offices and departments of the institution are governed on the principles of participation and transparency.
- Academic and administrative planning in the institution move hand in hand.
- The institution has a realistic academic calendar that is followed meticulously.
- The institution has a realistic and transparent admission policy, which is adhered to.

- The organization has an adequate and fair mechanism for creation and appointment of administrative staff and for their continued professional advancement.
- Management techniques and technologies, to the extent possible, are used by the institution for efficient running of all administrative and academic decision-making.

Parameter VII: Infrastructure facilities

- The institution has adequate physical facilities to run the educational programmes and administrative functions efficiently.
- The growth of the infrastructure keeps pace with the academic growth of the institution.
- The institution has effective mechanisms for maintenance and optimal use of infrastructure.

Parameter VIII: Support services

- The institution has sufficient and well-run support services to ensure the physical and intellectual health of all its constituencies.
- The institution has adequate library and computer facilities with easy access to all its constituencies.
- The institution practises relevant welfare schemes for all its constituencies.

Parameter IX: Student feedback and counselling

- The institution has an effective mechanism to use student feedback for the quality enhancement.
- The prospectus of the institution gives clear guidance to students about admission and completion requirements for all programmes, fee structure and refund policies, financial aid and student support services.
- Financial aid to students is distributed fairly.

- The institution offers competent academic counselling and placement services to its students.

Parameter X: Generation and management of financial resources

- The finances of the institution are judiciously allocated and effectively utilized to make its programmes and functioning cost-effective.
- The institution has imaginative and effective resource mobilization and management strategies.
- Budgeting and auditing procedures are regular and standardized.

Appendix 4. Pointers for quality for autonomous colleges (Aspects and credit points)

I. Curricular aspects	Credit points
1. What is the range of programme options available to students for awards such as degrees, certificates and diplomas?	For every 5 programme options 1 not exceeding, 8 points
2. To what extent are the programme options career-oriented?	>10% of the programmes, 1
3. Are programmes flexible enough to offer students the following benefits? (a) Time-frame matching student convenience and horizontal mobility (b) Elective options/ Non-core options	Peer judgement, satisfactory 1 for each aspect not exceeding 2
4. How often are the existing curricula for a subject reviewed and updated?	Peer judgement, satisfactory 1
5. What is the mechanism for formulating the curricular content of new programmes?	Peer judgement, satisfactory 1
6. How long does it take to introduce a new programme of study after it is conceptualized?	Up to two years 1
7. What are the new programmes introduced by the institution during the last two years?	Peer judgement, satisfactory 1
8. What percentage of the members of Boards of Studies, or such academic committees is external to the institution?	>20% 1
9. Are there other strategies to review academic programmes besides the Academic Council? If yes, how are such reviews made?	Peer judgement, satisfactory 1
10. To what extent, laboratory work, fieldwork and projects are incorporated in each of the programmes of study?	Peer judgement, good 2 satisfactory 1
11. How are the mission and goals of the institution, if any (other than the general - transmission and generation of knowledge) reflected through the curricula?	Peer judgement, good 2 satisfactory 1
12. Furnish details on the inter/multidisciplinary approach of the curriculum design.	Peer judgement, satisfactory 1
13. Does the institution offer any programme under the 'self-financing' mode, recently encouraged?	Peer judgement, satisfactory 1
14. In what ways has autonomy facilitated the institution to achieve its objectives?	Peer judgement, good 2 satisfactory 1

II. Teaching/learning and evaluation Credit points

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Furnish the following | | |
| • working days of the institution | As per UGC norm 1 | |
| • teaching days of the institution | As per UGC norm 1 | |
| 2. What percentage of the total budget is allocated to academic programmes (other than salary component)? | >3% 2 | |
| | 1% to 3% 1 | |
| 3. How are students selected for admission into various courses? | Peer judgement, satisfactory | 1 |
| 4. Apart from classroom instruction, what other avenues of learning are provided for students (projects, field training, seminars, etc.)? | Peer judgement, good | 2 |
| | Satisfactory | 1 |
| 5. Are bridge/remedial courses offered for students? | Peer judgement, good | 2 |
| | Satisfactory | 1 |
| 6. Give the ratio of full-time teachers to part-time teachers (last two years). | >1 | |
| | 1 | |
| 7. What percentage of classes does full-time faculty teach? | >50% | |
| | 1 | |
| 8. What type of evaluation method is currently being followed and how long has it been in practice? | Peer judgement, continuous and formative | 1 |
| | Revised within 5 years | 1 |
| 9. Are there guidelines for the selection of paper-setters and examiners? | Peer judgement, established criteria exist | 1 |
| 10. What method of valuation is followed? | Peer judgement, good | 2 |
| | Satisfactory | 1 |
| 11. What are the practices of the institution regarding the following? | | |
| • double evaluation | Peer judgement, good | 2 |
| • moderation and adjustment of the pass/fail ratio | Satisfactory | 1 |
| • re-evaluation | | |
| • re-totalling | | |
| 12. What is the time gap between the scheduled dates and actual dates in the conduct of examinations and announcing results? | Within 15 days from the schedule dates | |
| | 1 for examinations | |
| | Within 15 days from the schedule dates | |
| | 1 for results | |
| 13. How many of the academic faculty have at least a one-step higher qualification than the mandatory minimal level? | >50% | 2 |
| | 25% to 50% | 1 |

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- | | |
|--|---|
| 14. Give details of the number of teachers from other institutions and states. | > 80% from other institutions 2
50% to 80% 1
>20% from other states 2
10% to 20% 1 |
| 15. How do the faculty keep abreast with recent developments in their subject area? | Peer judgement, good 2
Satisfactory 1 |
| 16. Give the number of teachers who have attended seminars/conferences/workshops as participants/resource persons in the last three years. | > 50% one activity during the last 3 years 2
20% to 50% 1 |
| 17. How are faculty inducted in the use of computers, information technology and such support services? | Peer judgement, satisfactory 1 |
| 18. Does the institution follow the self-appraisal method to evaluate teachers on teaching, research and work satisfaction? How is the self-appraisal analyzed and used? | Peer judgement, good 2
Satisfactory 1 |
| 19. Does the institution have a mechanism other than self-appraisal to evaluate teachers on teaching, research and work satisfaction (peers, students, etc.)? | Peer judgement, good 2
Satisfactory 1 |
| 20. Give details on a few faculty development programmes and the number of faculty who have benefited from them during the last three years. | >10% 2
5% to 10% 1 |
| 21. Indicate the number of faculty who have availed themselves for study leave and on-duty leave for academic activities during the last three years. | Peer judgement, satisfactory 1 |
| 22. In what ways has autonomy helped the institution in teaching evaluation innovations? | Peer judgement, good 2
Satisfactory 1 |

III. Research, consultancy and extension

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. What percentage of faculty is actively involved in research (guiding research scholars, operating projects, publishing regularly etc.)? | >30% 1 |
| 2. Give details on ongoing research projects. | > 10% of the faculty 1 |
| 3. Is there a separate research committee to facilitate and monitor research? | Peer judgement, satisfactory 1 |
| 4. Furnish the following details: | |
| • research papers published at international and national levels | Peer judgement, satisfactory 1 for each aspect |
| • number of books published | not exceeding 6 points |
| • number of Ph.D.s. awarded during the last five years | |
| • number of research students currently registered for Ph.D. (full-time and part-time) | |

- number of full-time research scholars who have fellowships/scholarships (such as JRF/SRF, etc.)
 - awards/recognition for research work given during the last five years
5. Does the institution publicize the available expertise for consultancy services? Peer judgement, satisfactory 1
 6. Give broad areas of consultancy services provided by the institution during the last three years. Peer judgement, satisfactory 1
 7. Give particulars of the finance generated through consultancy services by the faculty. Peer judgement, satisfactory 1
 8. Does the institution have a designated person for extension activities? Peer judgement, full-time 2
Part-time 1
 9. What are the broad areas of extension activities? Peer judgement, good 2
Satisfactory 1
 10. Are any outreach programmes carried out by the institution other than NSS and NCC, e.g. population education club, adult education, national literacy mission, or any other? Peer judgement, satisfactory 1
 11. How are students and teachers encouraged to participate in extension activities? Peer judgement, good 2
Satisfactory 1
 12. Does the institution work and plan extension activities along with NGOs and GOs? Peer judgement, satisfactory 1

IV. Infrastructure and learning resources

1. Enclose the master plan of the campus indicating existing buildings and projected expansion in the future. Peer judgement, good 1
2. How does the institution plan to meet the need for augmenting the infrastructure to keep pace with academic growth? Peer judgement, good 1
3. How does the institution ensure/maintain its infrastructure? Peer judgement, good 1
4. How does the institution ensure optimum use of its infrastructure facilities? Peer judgement, good 1
5. Give details on the following:
 - number of working days of the library >teaching days 1
 - working hours of the library >teaching hours 1
 - advisory committee of the library Committee exists 1
 - inter-library exchange Peer judgement, satisfactory 1
 - book-bank facility Peer judgement, satisfactory 1
 - computerization of library services Peer judgement, satisfactory 1

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- | | |
|---|--|
| • ratio of library books to number of students enrolled | >40 vol./student 2
20 to 40 vol./student 1 |
| 6. Give the cost of books/journals/ periodicals that have been added to the central library in the last two years and their number. | > Rs. 5 lakh 2
Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 5 lakh 1 |
| 7. Does the library provide the following facilities: | |
| • reprographic | Peer judgement, satisfactory 1 |
| • computers | for each facility |
| • audio-video cassettes? | not exceeding 3 points |
| 8. Give the following details about the central computer facility: | |
| • configuration and other hardware and software | >20 terminals with updated software 1 |
| • working hours | 7 to 10 hours 1 |
| • output in developing computer-aided learning packages | For every five CAL packages 1 |
| • maintenance of computers | not exceeding 5 points |
| • distribution of computer facility, number, use, software, etc. | Peer judgement, satisfactory 1
Peer judgement, good 2 |
| 9. What physical and infrastructure facilities are available in the sports and physical education centre? | As per UGC norm 1 |
| 10. What physical and infrastructure facilities are available in the workshop? | As per UGC norm 1 |
| 11. What are the different welfare programmes of the institution? | Peer judgement, good 2
Satisfactory 1 |
| 12. Give details of the hostel facilities available in the campus. | >50% of the students 2
10% to 50% 1 |

V. Student support and progression

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Furnish the following details: | |
| • spread of students w.r.t. locale (same state, other state, NRI, overseas) | >10% from other states, NRI, overseas 1 |
| • pass percentage after the minimum period of study | >90% 1 |
| • drop-out rate | <5% after 4 months 1 |
| • achievement of students on competitive examinations | >5% in national level 1 |
| 2. Does the institution collect feedback from students regularly? How is the feedback obtained? How was it used last year? | Collected 1
Analyzed 1
Used 1 |
| 3. Are the contents of the prospectus updated annually? | Peer judgement, satisfactory 1 |
| 4. To what extent do students benefit from academic and career counselling? | Peer judgement, good 2
Satisfactory 1 |

- | | |
|---|--|
| 5. What kind of financial aids are available to students from central government, state government, the institution and others? Mention the number of students who have received aid during the last two years. | >10% students get financial aid of the unreserved category 2
5% to 10% 1 |
| 6. Does the institution have an employment cell and a placement officer who offers career counselling to students? | Peer judgement, good 2
Satisfactory 1 |
| 7. To what extent do faculty participate in academic and personal counselling? | Peer judgement, satisfactory 1 |
| 8. How many students were employed through placement services during the last year? | >5% of outgoing graduates 2
2% to 5% 1 |
| 9. Does the employment cell encourage students to be self-employed? How many are self-employed? | >5% 2
2% to 5% 1 |
| 10. Does the institution have an alumni association? If so, what are its activities? | Peer judgement, good 2
Satisfactory 1 |
| 11. How are prospective students informed clearly of rules and regulations, available facilities, criteria for admission etc.? | Peer judgement, good 2
Satisfactory 1 |
| 12. Are the following support services given to overseas students: one-window admission, special accommodation, induction courses, sociocultural activities, welfare programme, etc.? | Peer judgement, good 2
Satisfactory 1 |
| 13. What recreational/leisure-time facilities are available to students on the campus? | Peer judgement, satisfactory 1 |
| 14. Give details of the staff structure, and facilities available in the health centre. | For health centre 1
Permanent staff 1
>10 beds with facilities 2
5 to 10 beds 1 |
| 15. Are the following health-care facilities offered to students, faculty and staff?
• compulsory general medical check-up
• maintenance of health records
• compulsory health insurance | For each aspect 1 |
| 16. Are quotas in admission and financial support given to students proficient in sports? | Peer judgement, good 2
Satisfactory 1 |
| 17. Give details of participation of students and the outcome, at state, regional, national and international levels, during the last year. | For every participation not exceeding 5 points at national/international level 1 |

VI. Organization and management

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Does the college have an efficient internal co-ordinating and monitoring mechanism? | If there is a mechanism 1 |
| 2. Were any committees/external agencies appointed during the last three years to improve the organization and management? | Peer judgement, if yes 1 |
| 3. Does the college have an in-built mechanism to check the work efficiency of the non-teaching staff? | If yes 1 |
| 4. Is there a special committee for preparing the academic calendar? | If yes 1 |
| 5. Does the college have a mechanism to monitor scheduled academic activities with rigour? | Peer judgement, if 80% activities adhered to schedule 1 |
| 6. By and large have all the decisions of the selection committee/general body been approved? | Peer judgement, satisfactory 1 |
| 7. Does the college conduct professional development programmes for non-teaching staff?
Give details of training programmes attended by non-teaching staff. | If yes 1, Peer judgement, >50% benefited during last three years 2
25% to 50% 1 |
| 8. Has the college generated resources in the last year through the following sources: donations, fund-raising drives, alumni association, self-financing courses? | Peer judgement
> Rs.1,000,000 2
Rs.25,000 to Rs.1,000,000 1 |
| 9. Furnish the amount spent under the various heads of expenditure last year: | |
| • percentage of expenditure on academic services | > 3% 1 |
| • percentage of expenditure on administration and other common services | < 25 % 1 |
| • percentage of expenditure on student welfare services | > 3% 1 |
| 10. Is there an internal audit mechanism? | If yes 1 |
| 11. Tuition fee and changes in fee | For information |
| 12. Is there a grievance redressal cell in the college?
If yes, how does it deal with grievances of employees and others? | Peer judgement, satisfactory 1 |
| 13. Welfare schemes and loans. | Peer judgement, satisfactory 1 |

Appendix 5. Some reflections by an international observer

The international observer was well experienced as head of a national quality-assurance agency that primarily focused on certifying the quality of technical education programmes. The observer was with the peer team throughout the on-site visit for all the sessions, observing the interaction with the institutional members as well as the team discussions including the confidential discussions on institutional scores. Deleting the introductory and concluding statements, only the observations are given below.

Strengths and weaknesses

- NAAC appears to be administered and managed efficiently and effectively as was evident from the organization of the visit.
- The office of NAAC is operating as a team and cost-effective organization if the extent of the task is compared with staffing numbers in the NAAC office.
- The decision-making independence of the NAAC General Council and Executive Committee is seen as a real and essential strength of NAAC.
- The ability of NAAC to recruit persons of excellence in the team that visited the college is commendable.
- The process of assessment of institutional self-study, peer team visit, final decision-making by the NAAC Executive Committee, is in line with accepted international practice.
- The criteria for institutional assessment are comprehensive and must have been well tested in practice.
- Universities and colleges do attach real significance to assessment and accreditation by NAAC, as is evident from the fact that there is no compulsion on them to apply for assessment and accreditation – they apply voluntarily.

- NAAC provides comprehensive guidelines to the assessment team beforehand, which then proceeds to a thorough preparation of the details of the assessment.
- The pre-arranged meeting of the team with approximately 30 parents and alumni is viewed as an exceptional strength in the NAAC process.
- The NAAC assessment team spends time reflecting independently and collectively on interpreting its observations and finds.
- The meeting of the assessment team with approximately 60 students and the frank and open responses by students on matters of concern to them, are strengths that should not be ignored.
- The institutional-level assessment as arranged by NAAC goes into greater depth than the internationally accepted institutional audit. This audit generally covers internal quality-assurance policies and procedures without reference to institutional or programme quality.

The following observations may be more apparent than real. They are nevertheless recorded for NAAC's consideration:

- The remit of the NAAC appears to be limited to liberal arts institutions, while other bodies who may or may not have the same professional approach are charged with the quality assurance of professional programmes. Some institutions are thus assessed at institutional level and others at programme level.
- Direct comparison between the institutional assessment and accreditation conducted by NAAC and the programme assessment conducted by other bodies in India is inhibited. This may lead to conflicting interpretation of the intent with and meaning of assessment and accreditation.

- The non-compulsory, voluntary process of assessment and accreditation may leave institutions unassessed that may need it most.
- Although departments and programmes are included in the institutional-level assessment, its focus is inadequately detailed to identify shortcomings in programme quality.
- NAAC could provide more detailed guidelines for institutions to enable them to conduct a greater in-depth assessment of their own shortcomings and they could be requested to produce more detailed suggestions for improvement.
- The sheer magnitude of the Indian higher education system is posing a proportionate task to NAAC that may be impossible to accomplish. If the universal principle of a repetition of accreditation after four, five or eight years is accepted, the task becomes even more unattainable.
- NAAC could reconsider whether the current input of finances and resources into the assessment and accreditation process has the desired impact on the Indian higher education system as a whole. If every institution should be reassessed within the life cycle of students (4, 5 or 8 years?), then this observer suggests that obtainable finances and resources be extensively increased.
- Based on the experience of the single accompanied assessment visit, it is suggested that the NAAC counsellor extend guidelines on the self-study conducted by the institutions to contain a larger self-evaluative component under each parameter and even institutional suggestions for improvement of weaknesses. The self-study scrutinized gave mostly a description of institutional activities, with no evaluative judgement of strengths and weaknesses.

Opportunities and threats

A preliminary consideration of prospective challenges for NAAC, results in the following observations on available opportunities:

- Given adequate finances and resources, the NAAC is well positioned to have major impact on the quality of higher education in the second largest (or largest?) higher education system in the world. This could set an example to be followed internationally.
- Should NAAC extend its functions to programme or departmental-level assessment, distinct and separate from institutional-level assessment, students and Indian society could tremendously benefit from improvements in programme quality, where necessary.
- NAAC has the opportunity of promoting internal ownership of institutional quality, but it may require more emphasis on the departmental or programme levels of assessment. All staff and students should in some way be involved in and take ownership of internal quality assurance. This may require comprehensive descriptions by institutions of the internal quality-assurance policies and procedures. Internal quality assurance should be a regular routine activity and should not take place exclusively in preparation for a NAAC or other quality-assurance visit.

All quality-assurance bodies are threatened internationally by some internal and external forces. In the case of NAAC there may be special circumstances that pose a threat:

- The immense task faced by NAAC, must place the General Council and staff under tremendous stress. With their present resources, it could take decades for NAAC to merely conduct institutional-level assessments, unless special resources are introduced. To date, 14 of 150 universities and 115 of 10,500 colleges have been assessed.

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- As a result of these constraints, the period between visits to the same institution may be so long as to jeopardize the credibility of NAAC's activities.
- Viewed from the perspective of students and parents, NAAC may need to consider extending its focus on programme quality. An institution with a high institutional grading may have departments or programmes that would have had non-grading, if the departments or programmes had been assessed in more detail. In the current institutional-level assessment such weaknesses are not evident to clients.
- Visits of assessment teams to institutional departments are not adequately focused. As far as could be determined, little attention is paid to curriculum content, student assessment of both theory and practice and the standard and levels of examinations. (It is understood that those aspects are under the control of the affiliating university). This may put NAAC assessment in jeopardy.
- Careful financial planning by NAAC could transform a potential threat into strength. The observer believes therefore that the long-term mobility of NAAC will require much greater resources than are currently available.

Appendix 6. Impact of assessment and accreditation

Kindly record your frank reply to the questions given in this questionnaire. There are no right or wrong answers. The purpose of this questionnaire is to elicit your inputs on assessment and accreditation with special reference to the methodology and outcome, as you have experienced it.

1. What motivated you to volunteer for assessment and accreditation?

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2. What were your expectations from this process before you volunteered for assessment and accreditation?

.....

.....

.....

3. How far were your expectations from the process satisfied?

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.....

.....

4. What is your view about the preparation of the self-study report?

.....

.....

.....

5. What were your expectations of the visiting team?

.....

.....

.....

6. How far were your expectations of the peer team satisfied?

.....

.....

.....

7. Record your feedback on the following:

(a) *Peer team composition*: was it fair?

.....

(b) *Looking for evidence*: was it adequate?

.....

(c) *Document verification by the team*: was it non-intrusive?

.....

(d) *Sharing the issues of concern by the team*: was it open and transparent?

.....

(e) *Suggestions given in the report*: are they acceptable or biased with personal views?

.....

(f) *Commendations recorded in the report*: are the unique features of the institution noted well?

.....

8. Do you think the visit could be made more formal or informal and in what ways?

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9. Do you believe that the interactions with faculty, students, alumni and parents were useful to the team to get a feel of the institutional efforts?

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10. What is your feedback about the assessment report?

11. How did faculty perceive the report?

12. Did changes occur? What are they?

13. Did they result in real improvements? Explain.

14. Are you happy with the outcome of the process? Please specify.

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15. What follow-up activities may NAAC envisage for accredited institutions?

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16. Would you suggest a mid-term review?

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17. How would you rate the impact of AA on the following aspects of functioning of your institution? Kindly circle your option.

Aspects of functioning	Impact		
	High	Average	Nil
Realization on ownership for quality	1	2	3
Focus on goals and objectives	1	2	3
Going beyond constraints	1	2	3
Increase in programme options	1	2	3
Restructuring curriculum	1	2	3
Teaching/learning in the front stage	1	2	3
Stimulating research culture	1	2	3
Improved documentation	1	2	3
Improved student support services	1	2	3
Information technology as learning resource	1	2	3
Faculty development programmes	1	2	3
Unity among members	1	2	3
Greater interdepartmental interaction	1	2	3
Healthy competition among subunits	1	2	3
Rediscovering strengths and potentials	1	2	3
Triggering healthy practices	1	2	3
Community orientation	1	2	3
Change in policies and practices of the management	1	2	3
Recognizing stakeholder expectations	1	2	3
Greater involvement of students, parents and alumni	1	2	3
Inter-institutional networking	1	2	3
Planning for the future	1	2	3
Realizing the greater values of accreditation	1	2	3

External quality assurance in Indian higher education: case study of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

18. Any other feedback:

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Name of the institution:

Address:

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Name of the head of the institution:

Date of peer team visit:

Appendix 7. Assessor/assessee field experiences

NAAC has completed the assessment and accreditation of 118 institutions. Your expertise and inputs were vital during this process. NAAC would now like to collate your experiences and suggestions through a questionnaire given below. These inputs will also facilitate discussions during the workshop and help strengthen the process. The responses should not be based on a single impression per institution but on your overall perceptions. Please spare a few minutes to complete the following questionnaire and mail it to the NAAC office. A stamped self-addressed envelope is also enclosed:

1. During an institutional visit, to what extent have the following aspects contributed to the evaluation of the institution?

	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all
Presentation of the self-study	☐	☐	☐
Self-analysis	☐	☐	☐
Curriculum	☐	☐	☐
Teaching/learning practices	☐	☐	☐
Research, consultancy and extension	☐	☐	☐
Infrastructure	☐	☐	☐
Student support services	☐	☐	☐
Organization and management	☐	☐	☐
Financial standing of the institution	☐	☐	☐
Linkages with society	☐	☐	☐
Leadership's focus and presentation during the visit	☐	☐	☐
Arrangements	☐	☐	☐
Visit to departments	☐	☐	☐
Interactions with students	☐	☐	☐
Interaction with parents and alumni	☐	☐	☐
Interaction with management board	☐	☐	☐

* Please tick corresponding box ☒

2. Indicate how the following areas of the self-study report match the field experiences'.

	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all
Curricular offerings	☐	☐	☐
Quality of staff	☐	☐	☐
Quality of instruction	☐	☐	☐
Facilities and equipment	☐	☐	☐
Functioning of the governing board	☐	☐	☐
Student services	☐	☐	☐
Administrative leadership	☐	☐	☐
Library and learning resources	☐	☐	☐
Financial management	☐	☐	☐

3. Please indicate two important ways by which the self-study process can be made more meaningful'.

- Making it more detailed ☐
- Reducing information load during the site visit ☐
- Providing the institutions with more detailed guidelines on their role ☐
- Having more background data on the affiliating university ☐
- Detailed self-analysis ☐

4. To what extent have the following aspects been viewed differently by different peers, consequently leading to variations in judgement?

	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all
Programme options	☐	☐	☐
Research culture in the institution	☐	☐	☐
Publication of faculty members	☐	☐	☐
Infrastructure	☐	☐	☐
Teacher's display of solidarity with the management	☐	☐	☐
Location of the institution	☐	☐	☐
Student's communication skills	☐	☐	☐
Alumni positions	☐	☐	☐
Student input-output profile	☐	☐	☐
Social accreditation	☐	☐	☐

5. In your opinion, to what extent do the following aspects need to be strengthened to facilitate the peer team in making its tasks more effective?

	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all
Training	☐	☐	☐
Orientation	☐	☐	☐
Composition	☐	☐	☐
Adequate time before the visit	☐	☐	☐

6. You have visited several institutions as a peer team chairperson/ member. Please indicate if they differed noticeably in quality'.

Yes ☐ No ☐

If so have the scores appropriately reflected it? Yes ☐ No ☐

If not what could possibly be the reasons?

- Institution's inability to project itself ☐
 Chairperson/peer team members' mindset ☐
 Difficulty of the peer team to extract the right information ☐
 Time constraints ☐
 Difficulties in scoring ☐
 Any other ☐

7. Please indicate to what extent the accreditation results will help bring changes in the following aspects of the institutional functioning'.

	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all
Improving instruction	☐	☐	☐
Promoting systematic evaluation	☐	☐	☐
Clarifying mission and goals	☐	☐	☐
Monitoring internal quality	☐	☐	☐
Stimulating planning	☐	☐	☐
Improving student services	☐	☐	☐
Improving staff quality	☐	☐	☐
Improving resource allocation	☐	☐	☐
Creating a research culture	☐	☐	☐

8. During your visits to institutions, would a change in the peer team composition have altered the evaluation of the institution?

Yes ☐ No ☐

9. Please suggest how the accreditation process may focus more on 'outcomes' and use of measurable standards for assessing effectiveness in this area?

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10. If there is scope for improvement in the entire process and you are asked to make three vital suggestions, what would they be?

1.
-
2.
-
3.
-

Name : Date :

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The book

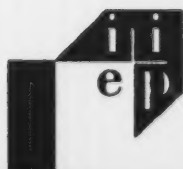
Quality in higher education is an increasingly important issue for many countries worldwide. In a context marked by the expansion of higher education and the globalization of economic activities, education has become a national concern with an international dimension. To cope with this changing context, countries are under pressure to ensure and assure quality of higher education at a nationally comparable and internationally acceptable standard.

Consequently, a number of countries have initiated 'national quality assurance mechanisms' and many more are in the process of developing a suitable strategy. Most quality assurance bodies were established in the nineties and, after a few years of practical experience, they are now rethinking the issues related to quality assurance. This report is an attempt to share India's experience in this area with other countries confronted with similar types of problems.

The author

Antony Stella is Adviser of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). She joined NAAC in 1996 as its Deputy Adviser, and as one of the first group of officers recruited, has been a part of all its developmental activities.

She has published on educational technology as well as on assessment and accreditation, and has more than 75 articles and seven books to her credit. She is the recipient of the Indo-Shastri Canadian Faculty Research Award and a Fulbright Post-doctoral Fellowship.



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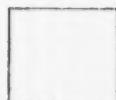


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